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THOUGHTS ON BAPTISM,

AS AN

Ordinance of Proselytism;

INCLUDING

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CONTROVERSY

RESPECTING

TERMS OF COMMUNION.

By AGNOSTOS.

"I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say."—PAUL.

Second Edition.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR FRANCIS WESTLEY, 10, STATIONERS' COURT, LUDGATE-STREET.

1823.

LONDON:

SHACKELL AND ARROWSMITH, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET-STREET.

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THOUGHTS ON BAPTISM,

&c.

THE union of Christians of various denominations to advance the Redeemer's kingdom, chiefly by means of Bible and Missionary Societies, must prove highly gratifying to every pious mind. We hail this union, so far as it has hitherto proceeded, on account of the prospect that it exhibits, still more than of the pleasure that it affords. We regard it as the harbinger of that period, when, to adopt the language of a justly celebrated poet,

> "The noise of jarring sectaries shall cease,
> And *e'en the dipt and sprinkled* live in peace:
> Each heart shall quit its prison in the breast,
> And flow in *free communion* with the rest."

Much has been done to effect this desirable object, but much more remains to be done; for we have every reason to believe that the union of Christians with each other, will be more cordial and more complete than it has ever yet been, before the outpouring of the Spirit in the latter day. We are not in much danger of too highly appreciating the subject of Christian unity, when we reflect that one great end of the death of Christ is

stated to be, "to gather together in one, the children of God who were scattered abroad." This important object lay very near the heart of the Redeemer, while offering up his last intercessory prayer in the presence of his disciples, just before he suffered; especially when he uttered those emphatic words, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word: *that they all may be one*, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me:*" intimating by the latter clause, which he urges as a plea to enforce his petition, that he did not expect to see his messiahship universally acknowledged, nor his kingdom fully established till this union was completely effected.

The prophetic vision of Ezekiel, recorded in the 37th chapter of his prophecy, suggests the same idea. The bones which he saw in the open valley, he was told, represented the whole house of Israel: and who that is acquainted with the state of Christianity at the present period, but must acknowledge that they furnish as apt an emblem of the whole world of professing Christians? very many, indeed, but very dry; while their mutual animosities have, for ages together, tended to widen and perpetuate that separation from each other, which is the effect and the evidence of moral and spiritual death. On surveying the melancholy scene, one is ready to exclaim, "Can these bones live?" Yes, they can, they shall; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and with God nothing is impossible. But how, and under what circumstances shall this work be accomplished? Not in a state of separation from each other; no, surely; they must be re-united before they are re-animated. Bone must come to his bone. Every member must find his own place in the body of which he forms a part. The eye

must no more say to the hand, I have no need of thee, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you. When this union is fully effected, then, and not till then, may we expect the Spirit of life from God to enter into them; and they will stand up an exceeding great army.

This cordial union of Christians is necessary, not only for obtaining that combination of effort which is requisite for evangelizing the world, but also for the purpose of giving such a view of the nature and tendency of genuine Christianity, as nothing short of this can exhibit. To this, perhaps, more than to any of the other means employed in the apostolic age, may be attributed the rapid progress of the gospel during that period, when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul."

It becomes then a subject of serious enquiry, what are the principal obstacles to this union among Christians, which is so very desirable, and what means are best adapted to the removal of these obstacles? On minute investigation, it is more than probable that it will appear, in respect of most of the differences subsisting among real Christians, and such differences as have, on various occasions, excited the greatest hostility to each other, that the opposing parties have been nearly at an equal distance from the truth, to which they have both exclusively laid claim. Such differences very much resemble the ancient dispute between the Jews and Samaritans, respecting the place where men ought to worship, while the nature of true worship, and the important ends for which it was instituted, were equally overlooked by both.

There is, perhaps, no subject of controversy, to which the above remark will more forcibly apply, than to that of Baptism; which, it is much to be regretted, has, of late years, been revived, with a

pertinacity, if not with an asperity, equal to that which has accompanied the agitation of it at any former period. A bye-stander, however, who is not enlisted under the banners of either of the contending parties, observing how very dexterously they handle their weapons when assailing their antagonists, and how extremely deficient they appear when attempting to establish their own peculiar views, may be led to suspect that they are both in the wrong, and that the error lies in the common ground which they agree to occupy, and which forms the basis of their respective systems. This will bring him to the previous question, a question which, however important, seems never to have come properly before the public, at least not to have met with that consideration to which it is certainly entitled. Was Baptism designed to be a standing ordinance of the Christian Church, to be perpetuated from age to age?—or was it appointed, in its original institution, as an ordinance of proselytism, of which, (if continued at all,) Missionaries are the only proper administrators, and Proselytes the only proper subjects? To conduct the reader to the latter conclusion, is the design of the following pages; and should the writer succeed in the attempt, and his views of the subject be generally adopted, he will consider himself as having rendered a very important service to the religious public, by removing out of the way, what has hitherto proved one of the greatest hindrances to that union of Christians, which, as stated above, seems indispensably requisite to effect the universal spread of the gospel, and usher in the glory of the latter day.

We come now to the subject more immediately before us; but in order to do justice to it, we must trace Baptism to its origin, and mark the circumstances which attended its introduction, the light in

which it was regarded, and the end which it was designed to answer.

This ordinance was introduced, according to the account of it which is given us in the New Testament, by John, the forerunner of our Lord, who appears himself to have been a very extraordinary character. The length of time which had elapsed since any prophet had been seen in Israel, the family of John, so well known and so highly respected, the remarkable circumstances attending his birth, his rigid austerity and unfeigned piety, the peculiar situation of the people at that time, groaning under the Roman yoke and anxious for deliverance, together with the universal expectation then entertained by the Jews of the speedy approach of the Messiah, and even by the Gentiles of the appearance of some extraordinary personage, who should ameliorate the condition of mankind, and restore the golden age—all concurred to awaken curiosity and excite attention; so that, when John commenced his ministry, though it was in the most recluse and least populous part of the country, in the wilderness, as it is called, he immediately drew vast multitudes after him; for we are informed by the Evangelists, that there went out to him, not the inhabitants of Jerusalem only, but of the land of Judea, and all the region round about. And they were all baptized by him in Jordan, confessing their sins. That the Baptism administered by John was an ordinance of proselytism will not admit of a doubt. The subjects of it were such as were capable of receiving instruction, and making a profession; upon which, being baptized by him, they were considered as his disciples or proselytes.

The growing fame of John did not escape the notice of the Jewish rulers. It is more than probable that it excited their envy, and that they began to entertain serious apprehensions, lest the respect in

which he was held, and the influence which he possessed, should eclipse their reputation, and diminish their authority. They accordingly sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to interrogate him on the subject. Their object appears to have been, not so much to learn the nature and design of the ordinance which he administered, for of that they seemed fully aware, but what were his pretensions for administering that ordinance. It was not so much, *What* doest thou? as *who* art thou? and *why* doest thou thus? What exalted personage art thou? what special commission hast thou received from heaven, that thou shouldst baptize and make proselytes? The answer of John is well known. He disclaimed the character of the Messiah, and professed to act only as his forerunner, to prepare his way, agreeably to ancient prophecy. Whether these rulers were satisfied with this declaration of John or not, they well knew that he stood too high in the estimation of the people, to permit them, with safety, openly to oppose him. They would not, however, give him their sanction, as appears from another part of this history, where they are said to have rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized by him.

At this period, a circumstance took place, too important to be allowed to pass unnoticed, whatever bearing it may have on the present question. While John was administering the rite of Baptism to the multitudes that flocked to him from every quarter, our Lord thought proper to present himself as a candidate. This excited (as might be supposed) the surprise of John, who would have declined the honour that was thus to be put upon him. "I have need (says he) to be baptized by thee, and comest thou unto me?" "Suffer it to be so now (was the answer of our divine Redeemer), for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

Our Lord by employing the pronoun us, on this occasion, includes the administrator with himself; for, surely, if it became him to submit to the ordinance, it was no less becoming in John to administer it, when required by him so to do. Many have inferred from this, that believers, in the present day, ought to be baptized because their Lord and Saviour was baptized; seeing he hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps. But this is by no means a necessary consequence. There were many things which became our Lord, and which constituted a part of that righteousness which, as the Redeemer of his people, he was to fulfil, which are not at all obligatory upon us: nay, there are some, in which it would be even sinful for us to attempt to imitate him. To accomplish the work of our redemption he took our nature upon him, was made under the law, and rendered obedience to that law, ceremonial as well as moral. He was circumcised, kept the passover, and conformed exactly to the Jewish ritual. Nor was this all: for, in the present instance, he was pleased, by his own example, to sanction an ordinance which was appointed as *introductory* to a dispensation that was afterwards to be more fully established. This circumstance, however, affords no well-founded argument for the perpetuity of Baptism as an ordinance of the Christian church; especially when it is recollected that the baptism to which our Lord submitted, was the baptism of John, which, it is agreed on all hands, was but local and temporary.

There was, nevertheless, a peculiar propriety in this act of condescension, on the part of our Redeemer, at the precise period in which it took place; and this seems to be intimated in the mode of expression, "Suffer it to be so *now*." An opportunity was afforded at this time, of which our Saviour thought proper to avail himself, while thus bearing

testimony to the character of John, of receiving a divine attestation to his own character and mission; and this, in the most solemn manner conceivable, in full view of the assembled multitude, just when he was about to commence his public ministry. This august transaction has frequently and very justly been considered as affording a striking exhibition of the doctrine of the sacred Trinity; in which each of the Divine persons appears in his own character and office, according to the economy of the covenant of redemption. Behold the Son of God in the midst of the flowing stream, receiving the baptismal rite; while the Holy Spirit, probably like a lambent flame, in a dove-like shape, is seen, descending upon and hovering over him; and a voice from heaven, the voice of God the Father, is heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!" Such were some of the ends to be answered by this memorable event; enough surely to justify that seeming deviation from propriety, which so forcibly struck the mind of John, in the character of one who had no sins to confess, and who was infinitely superior to the person to whom he appeared thus to submit himself.

Shortly after this transaction, we read that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples. From this we learn that the Baptism administered by our Lord, or rather by his disciples under his immediate direction, proceeded exactly upon the same principle as that of John, his fore-runner, at least in this respect, it was an ordinance of proselytism; and when we consider what vast multitudes were baptized at this time by one or the other, and how small the number of true converts before the effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we are necessarily led to the conclusion, that an external profession was deemed sufficient to entitle any one to

the ordinance, without a rigid scrutiny into the state of the heart.

From this time we hear little or nothing of Baptism, except as it is on certain occasions metaphorically alluded to, till after our Lord's resurrection from the dead; when, just before his ascension to glory, he commissioned his Apostles to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. The terms of this commission demand our closest attention, as constituting the *only* authority on which the practice is founded. "Go ye therefore, (was the language of our divine Redeemer, as recorded by Matthew) and teach (disciple or proselyte) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. The word which, in our version of the Bible, is translated "teach," in the first of these verses, signifies to proselyte, or make disciples. Dr. Doddridge, in his Family Expositor, employs the first of these terms, "proselyte all nations," &c. It is of exactly the same import with that which occurs in the passage referred to above, where it is said that Jesus *made* and baptized more *disciples* than John. It appears, clearly, from comparing these passages together, that, so far as proselytism is concerned, this commission of our Lord proceeded on the same principle with the practice of John, and that of his own disciples during his personal ministry. Their sphere of action was, indeed, considerably enlarged, embracing all nations: yet to whatever extent it is carried, it is still connected with proselytism; while not a syllable is said about the descendants of those who were thus to be proselyted and baptized.

From the promise annexed "Lo, I am with you

always, even unto the end of the world," it has been inferred that the ordinance of Baptism must be of perpetual obligation. But, neither the words themselves, nor the situation in which they are found, will support such an inference: for, it must be obvious to every reflecting mind, that the spiritual presence of Christ with his disciples, would have been equally necessary, and doubtless would, at this particular period, when his bodily presence was about to be totally withdrawn, have been made as much the subject of a special promise, if no such ordinance as that of Baptism had been appointed. Besides, if we read the whole passage, we shall see that the promise stands more immediately connected with those subsequent instructions, which would form the important topics of the gospel ministry in all succeeding ages, after the Apostles had closed their testimony, even to the end of time, when Baptism, as an ordinance of proselytism, would be no longer requisite.

But if any just inference can be drawn from a supposed connexion between the precept and the promise, on the ground of proximity of situation, the record of this transaction by the Evangelist Mark, would lead us to an opposite conclusion: for there, after the recital of the commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned;" it is immediately added, "and these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Here we find the institution of Baptism closely connected with the promise of miraculous gifts; and indeed this connexion seems to coincide

with the nature and design of that ordinance far better than the other. Miracles and ceremonies were the distinguishing characteristics of the Jewish dispensation. In both, an appeal is made to the senses. They were, therefore, well adapted to that period of the church, which is justly represented by the Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, as a state of childhood. Children, we know, are more affected with that which is presented to the eye, than that which is addressed to the ear. They are generally better pleased with pictures than with books, and learn more from striking exhibitions than from abstract reasonings. Hence, the former dispensation was a dispensation of ceremonies, a shadow of good things to come; very useful at that period, but not meant to be perpetual, being, like miraculous gifts, no longer requisite, when the Christian dispensation should be fully established.

Baptism, indeed, seems to partake of the nature of both dispensations, being partly Jewish and partly Christian, though not exclusively belonging to either. It was, therefore, well adapted to form the close of one and the commencement of the other. In its mode of administration, it much resembled the legal purifications, which, in the epistle to the Hebrews, are called divers washings, or baptisms, (as the word is in the original) being a part of those carnal ordinances, that were to continue in force only till the time of reformation: while, in respect of its subjects, it essentially differed from them; exacting of every candidate that profession of faith and repentance, which the law never required of those who participated, nor even of those who administered its most solemn rites. Baptism may, therefore, be considered as a sort of twilight ordinance, interposing between the shadows of Jewish ceremonies, which were about to flee away, and

that glorious day of gospel light that was just ready to dawn on a benighted world.

Our Lord was pleased to adopt this ordinance, which had been introduced by John his forerunner, instead of instituting a new rite, as might have been expected, when he commissioned his Apostles to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. Viewed in the light in which we have hitherto considered it, there was much wisdom in the appointment. Baptism, as an ordinance of proselytism, was well known; it had already been practised to a considerable extent, and the nature and design of it could not be misunderstood.

But it may be asked, If Baptism was ordained only for a particular purpose, adapted to circumstances then existing, why was it enjoined with such solemnity, and enforced with such strictness, especially, (as recorded by Mark) connected with the declaration, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved?" We reply to this by observing, that the declaration referred to, instead of militating against the sentiment we have advanced, tends very much to confirm it: for it stamps such an importance on the ordinance of Baptism at that period, as can by no means be attached to it, as practised among us at the present day. Hence the difficulty that commentators have universally found, in their attempts to interpret this passage, and the various ways in which they have sought to evade its force, or explain away its meaning. Let us consider the subject a little more attentively, and we shall see clearly how the matter stands.

In every period of the church, and under every dispensation, a public profession of religion, in one way or other, has been considered as essential to the character of the people of God; and in proportion to the clearness of the light and the extent of the privilege, the duty has become more indispensable.

Hence we read, (Matt. x. 32, 33.) "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven." Such was the solemn declaration of our Lord during the period of his public ministry: but when, after his resurrection from the dead, he commissioned his Apostles to proselyte all nations, he was pleased to require those who embraced their doctrine to make a public profession of the same, not by a mere verbal declaration of their faith in him, but by a significant and solemn act, in the name of the sacred Trinity. There was a great propriety in this. Words are liable to different constructions, and may be understood in different senses, conveying more or less of meaning, according to the varying circumstances of him that utters them. But an act of this sort could neither be misunderstood nor retracted. The rubicon was passed, and they must abide by the consequences. It was impossible to go back without incurring the charge, and exposing themselves to the odium of apostacy from the faith. In this view the declaration, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," was not too strong. Being baptized, in compliance with the command of Christ, was at that period, and under those circumstances, absolutely necessary to prove that their faith was genuine, and that they were in a state of salvation.

This view of the subject is illustrated and confirmed by the language of the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand souls appear to have been converted under one discourse. Deeply convinced of the guilt they had incurred, and dreading the vengeance to which they had exposed themselves, by the murder of the Lord of life and glory, they said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we

do?" Then Peter said unto them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." O what rich encouragement! what heavenly consolation! what divine joy! were these words adapted to inspire into the hearts of those who but a short time before had clamorously demanded the crucifixion of the Redeemer, impiously saying, "His blood be on us and on our children!" and now to hear that a way was open, in which they and their children might be rescued from that destruction which they had thus wickedly imprecated, by repenting of their sins, believing in Christ, and being baptized in his name! It is added, "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Then (it follows) they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. Here we see Baptism standing in exactly the same connection with faith on the one hand and salvation on the other, as in the declaration recorded by Mark, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark (it is generally understood) wrote his gospel under the direction of Peter, who doubtless recollected the above expression of our Lord, and knew full well how to understand it. This same Apostle also, in his first general epistle, referring to the ark, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water, adds, "The like figure whereunto, even Baptism doth also *now* save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter iii. 20, 21.

It appears clearly from the above statement, that

Baptism was *at that period*, in a certain sense, a *saving* ordinance. It was the divinely appointed means, by which, in connection with faith and repentance, those whom the Apostle Peter addressed were exhorted to *save themselves* from the awful judgments denounced against the Jewish nation, which subsequently came upon them, even before that generation had passed away, but from which those who thus professed their faith in Christ were happily exempt. When performed in obedience to the command of their risen and exalted Redeemer, as a fruit of faith, with right views, and under the influence of proper motives, it also furnished satisfactory evidence of interest in the more important and invaluable blessings of spiritual and eternal salvation. We may further observe, that Baptism was *then* the *only* door of entrance into the visible church of Christ, the *only* means of access to Christian fellowship and the communion of saints, by which those who were formerly aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, were brought nigh, considered and treated as being no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; having a right to partake of *all* the ordinances, and enjoy *all* the privileges to which Christians are entitled, to *none* of which they could before lay claim. By attending to this ordinance, it was the will of Christ that those who were converted to the faith by the ministry of the Apostles and Evangelists, should come out from among the unbelieving Jews and idolatrous Gentiles, with whom they were previously mingled, and form a distinct community, united among themselves, and separate from their former associates.

Such being the nature of Baptism in its original institution, and such the ends to be answered by its

appointment, the fair presumption is, that being ordained under peculiar circumstances, and for special purposes, not corresponding with our present situation, it was not intended to be made a standing ordinance of the Christian Church, to be perpetuated from age to age; nor are we obliged so to regard it without a clear and explicit command to that effect. Such a command is certainly not to be found in the terms of the commission. Some have supposed it to be included in the words that immediately follow, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." But if so, we must certainly find some trace of it in the subsequent writings of the Apostles: otherwise, the obvious inference must be, either that the perpetuity of the ordinance of Baptism was not among the number of those things which Christ commanded, and which they were consequently bound to teach his people to observe; or, that they have been, in this respect at least, sadly deficient in their duty; seeing they have left us so much in the dark on the subject. This is the more extraordinary, as on every other branch of Christian duty, they have been so very explicit, not sparing to urge it, under all the varied forms of precept, exhortation, admonition, warning, and caution. But, in regard to Baptism, whether their epistles are addressed to ministers, to churches, or to individuals, there seems on this subject, one had almost said, a studied silence. There is no injunction to enforce it, no exhortation to press it, no admonition or warning of the danger of delaying or neglecting it, no caution against the abuse of it; nor is there any intimation, from which we can certainly infer that it was meant to be continued from age to age. It was not so under the former dispensation. There, if an ordinance was appointed that was designed to be perpetual, that is, to continue as long as the dispensa-

tion lasted, it was specified as such. Hence we read so repeatedly, "This shall be a statute for ever." "This shall be an ordinance to be observed in all your generations." Nor were they left to vague conjecture, either as to the mode of performing these ordinances, or the persons to whom it appertained to administer or to partake of them. Indeed, we may venture to lay it down as a certain rule, founded on the equity of the Divine government, and applicable to all the ordinances which God has appointed; that the perspicuity with which they are defined will be invariably proportioned to the strictness with which they are enforced, and the importance attached to their observance. Let this rule be once admitted, and we are furnished with an unanswerable argument against the perpetuity of the ordinance of Baptism. For never was any ordinance, instituted with such solemnity, enforced with such strictness, and having such importance attached to it at the time of its enactment; being closely connected, not with the possession or forfeiture of temporal good, but with the salvation of the precious and immortal soul; and yet, in respect of its continued observance, so extremely vague and indefinite; leaving us (if we may judge from the contradictory opinions entertained concerning it) in a mist of obscurity and a labyrinth of perplexity, without a clue to guide us, either in respect of the description of character authorized to administer the ordinance, the kind of persons who are the proper subjects of it, or the mode of its performance. All this is perfectly unaccountable upon the supposition that it was intended to be a standing ordinance of the Christian church. Admit the contrary, and every difficulty vanishes. Instead of perplexing ourselves any further on the subject, we may rest satisfied, being already in possession of all

that it is requisite for us to know, on a subject with which personal duty has no necessary connection.

It may, notwithstanding, be contended, that an ordinance once instituted with such solemnity, and enforced with such strictness, as we have admitted respecting Baptism, must necessarily be considered as of perpetual obligation, unless repealed by the same authority, and in a manner as clear and definite, as the declaration by which it was first enacted. This is certainly very plausible, and is perhaps the strongest argument that can be adduced in favour of the practice. But if we closely examine it, we shall perceive that it is far from being so conclusive as we might, at first sight, imagine. Happily for us, we have a precedent set before us in the New Testament; the proper consideration of which will materially assist our investigation of this important point. The ceremonial law, in its various branches, was delivered by Moses to the Israelites with all due solemnity, and the observance of it enforced with the utmost strictness. It might, therefore, have been expected, that if ever it should be abrogated, it would be by the mandate of authority, or by a special commission from heaven for the purpose, and that in terms so explicit as to leave no room for doubt or hesitation on the subject, in the mind of any who truly feared God. This, however, we know was not the case. Many of the believing Jews, for a considerable time after their having embraced Christianity, cherished a fond regard for those institutions which for so long a period they had been accustomed to venerate. Now, by what means were they to be detached from these antiquated rites, to which they were so closely wedded? Not by the dictate of authority, compelling an immediate, entire, and absolute relinquishment of them, but by the dint of argument, showing that

when first instituted they were not designed to be of perpetual obligation; that they were appointed for a special purpose; and when that purpose was fully accomplished, there existed no longer any obligation to regard them.

This mode of proceeding, with respect to the ceremonial law, serves to establish a very important principle, which will apply to all the commands of God, without exception. It is this. The moment that the reason for which any command was given, ceases, that moment the obligation to obey such command ceases with it. A proper attention to this rule would have preserved many from those errors into which they have been betrayed by a servile regard to precepts and examples recorded in the New Testament, without inquiring the reason of such observances, the end to be answered by them, and whether it is necessary and expedient for us, in our present circumstances, which may be widely different from theirs, to employ the same means for the attainment of such end. We may refer to one or two instances which occur in the historical part of the New Testament, by way of illustration.

When, at an early period of the Christian church, a question arose respecting the propriety of imposing upon Gentile converts the necessity of conforming to the Jewish ritual, a consultation of the Apostles and Elders was held at Jerusalem upon the subject; when, after much debate, it was determined that nothing more should be required of them than those "necessary things," as they are called, "To abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which (it is added) if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well." Now, with respect to the last of the things here mentioned, it has always been considered, and very properly, as necessary for us to abstain from it as for them; yet, though no distinction whatever is

made in the decree between one and the other, we have always been accustomed to regard the rest as deriving all their importance from peculiar circumstances then existing, and consequently not obligatory upon us, who are placed in different circumstances. On this subject Dr. Doddridge observes, that " the *reason* of the prohibition *is now ceased*, and the *obligation* to abstain from these things *ceases with it*;" which exactly corresponds with the position we have advanced.

Again, it pleased our Lord, on a certain occasion, in order to inculcate more forcibly the necessity of humility and condescension among his followers, first to wash the feet of his disciples, and then to explain his reasons for so doing, saying, " If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you." Here we have a positive injunction of Christ, sanctioned by his own example; and yet it is generally understood to be the spirit and not the letter of this precept and example, to which we are bound to conform.

Under the former dispensation, indeed, there were positive institutions, the propriety or expediency of which was never considered as a proper subject of inquiry or discussion, so long as that dispensation continued in force; nor was the least excuse admitted, for any neglect, delay, or deviation from the prescribed mode of observing them: it being (as we are told) of the nature of *positive institutions*, to require implicit obedience on the *sole ground* of the authority of the Legislator. Hence, we repeatedly find instances of disobedience to such precepts, though in things apparently trivial, punished with the utmost severity, as acts of rebellion against the King of Zion. Now, it is urged by many, that the ordinances of divine service enjoined upon us,

though fewer in number, and more simple in their nature, than those which belonged to the former dispensation, yet, being like them *positive institutions*, they proceed exactly on the *same principle*, and ought to be enforced with the *same strictness*.

On this ground, the Baptists defend their conduct in refusing communion at the Lord's table to Pædobaptists; nor is it easy to see with what justice or propriety those who admit the above principle can censure them for so doing. Let us hear their reasoning on this subject, as presented to us by the late Mr. Booth, in his "Apology for the Baptists; in which they are vindicated from the charge of laying an unwarrantable stress on the ordinance of Baptism." In the third section of his treatise on this subject, he thus expresses himself:—"As the sovereign will of God is more concerned and manifested in positive ordinances than in any other branches of holy worship; so it is evident from the history of the Jewish church, that the divine jealousy was never sooner inflamed, nor ever more awfully expressed, than when God's ancient people *failed* in their obedienee to such commands, or *deviated from the prescribed rule of such institutions*. The destruction of Nadab and Abihu by fire from heaven; the breach that was made upon Uzzah; the stigma fixed and the curses denounced on Jeroboam; together with the fall and ruin of all mankind by our first father's disobedience to a positive command, are among the many authentic proofs of this assertion." In order to show how the above remarks apply to the object that he has in view, which is to prove the necessity and importance of Baptism, as a term of communion, he adds, "The clearer light which God has afforded, and the richer grace which Christ has manifested, under the present dispensation, are so far from *lessening*, that they evidently *increase* our obligations to perform

every divine command relating to Christian worship. Accursed, then, is the principle, and rebellious is the conduct of those professors, who think themselves warranted by the grace of the gospel to trifle with God's positive appointments, any more than the priests or the people were of old."

Another author, whom Mr. B. quotes with approbation, after stating, in respect of the ordinances of the gospel, "that the primitive mode of administration *should be strictly and conscientiously adhered to*," adds, "In a former dispensation, in which the ritual was numerous and burdensome, the great Jehovah was particularly jealous of his honour as supreme lawgiver, and looked upon the *least innovation as a direct opposition to his authority.* Moses, we are informed, was admonished of God to make all things according to the pattern showed him in the mount. And those unfortunate youths who presumed to alter the form of his religion, and worship him in a way he had not commanded, fell under the severest marks of his displeasure; which shews that he looked upon the *least innovation* in the *ceremonial part* of his precepts, as an *impious and daring opposition and contempt* of his authority, and deserving of as peculiar and distinguished vengeance, as a *direct and open violation of the moral law.* And as the great King of the universe required such strictness and punctuality, and insisted on such scrupulous exactness in the performance of the minutest rite belonging to the legal dispensation, it would be extremely difficult to assign a reason why he should be more lax and careless, and allow a greater scope to human discretion, under the Christian economy. The greater light which shines in our religion, the small number and simplicity of its ceremonials, and the end and design of those institutions being *more clearly revealed*, are reasons which *strongly indi-*

cate the contrary." He then proceeds to point out the absurdity (as he is pleased to term it) of supposing "that the sublime Author of our religion will *dispense with the performance of his positive laws, or admit of the least variation.*"

Mr. Booth, in his celebrated work, entitled "Pædobaptism examined, on the principles, concessions, and reasonings of the most learned Pædobaptists," insists upon it, that "Baptism is as really and entirely a positive institution, as any that were given to the chosen tribes;" and that "the disciples of Christ are as much obliged to regard the positive laws of the New Testament, with *strict* punctuality, as the Jews were to observe that divine ritual which is contained in the books of Moses*." It must be acknowledged, however, in justice to Mr. B. that he is by no means singular in his view of the nature of positive institutions, and the obligation of Christians to regard gospel ordinances as such; in proof of which we need only refer to the various quotations with which the above work abounds, from learned doctors and eminent prelates, who have expressed their ideas on the subject in terms nearly as strong as those employed by Mr. B. himself.

Now, if the above sentiments are just, and Mr. B.'s views of the ordinance of Baptism are correct, in what light are we to regard the conduct of those who have not only deviated from the mode, without any scriptural authority for so doing, but have absolutely changed the ordinance itself, in its very nature, and the design and end for which it was instituted; so that (except in the name, and the form of words employed in its administration) it bears no resemblance whatever to that ordinance which our Lord commanded his Apostles to administer:

* See "Pædobaptism Examined, &c." pages 13 and 165.

for among Pædobaptists, Baptism, instead of being the appointed token of a personal and individual profession of faith, as originally intended, is neither more nor less than a certain mode of dedicating children to God: a purpose very different from that for which Baptism was originally instituted; a purpose, the idea of which we hesitate not to say, would never be likely to enter into the mind of a sincere inquirer after truth, who had no means of ascertaining it but such as the New Testament affords.

With these views of the subject, who shall dare to charge the Baptists with laying an *unwarrantable* stress on the ordinance of Baptism? or wonder at their refusing to hold communion with Pædobaptists at the Lord's table? The greater wonder is, that they will have any communion with them at all, or shew them the smallest degree of respect; for if the *least innovation* in a positive institution is a crime as heinous, and deserving a punishment as severe, as *a direct and open violation of the moral law*, according to the sentiment advanced above, then surely the Baptists would be fully justified in refusing to unite with such flagitious offenders in any religious exercise whatever, as well as in the celebration of the Lord's Supper; yea, it would be their duty (however painful to their feelings) to testify, in every possible way, their abhorrence of such atrocious conduct, instead of acknowledging such to be Christians, and treating them as brethren, as, through an excess of candour and liberality, they are sometimes disposed to do. For let it be recollected, that the offence with which Pædobaptists stand charged, is *not merely a single deviation* from the prescribed rule of a positive institution, but a line of conduct which they are habitually and invariably pursuing; nor is this all; for they not only violate this positive precept themselves, but actually teach men so to do.

What then can we think of the Divine conduct towards such characters? We do not, indeed, in the present day, expect to see transgressors, however aggravated the offence may be, consumed by fire from heaven, as Nadab and Abihu were, or visited with instant death, like Uzzah, when he presumptuously touched the ark. But if their crime, as stated above, is as heinous, and deserving a punishment as severe, as *a direct and open violation of the moral law*, we should expect to behold some tokens of the divine displeasure, such as we have repeatedly witnessed in the case of those who have disgraced their profession by a conduct grossly immoral. In some such instances, however dignified the character, eminent the talent, exalted the title, and extensive the influence, which they may previously have possessed, no sooner has the fact been indubitably ascertained, than they have sunk like a millstone in the mighty waters—sunk to rise no more. Others, in similar circumstances, have attempted to continue in the exercise of their profession, having no other means of support; but they have only dragged out a miserable existence, without credit and without comfort; their respectability gone, their influence at an end, and a fatal extinguisher put over all their prospects of future usefulness. The effect has been nearly the same, where the fundamental doctrines of the gospel have been denied or disregarded. In all these cases, that solemn declaration of Jehovah has been fully verified, "Them that honour me I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Such is God's method of dealing with those who incur his displeasure by walking contrary to him.

But what do we behold in the case before us? Just the reverse of all this. We see a class of delinquents, whose offence is exactly of the same description with that which called down fire from

heaven on the guilty heads of the culprits; being no less than *a deviation from the prescribed rule of a positive institution;* and nothing, according to Mr. B. can be conceived more horribly provoking to God, or more adapted to excite his keenest indignation, and the most awful displays of his vengeance; and this offence too, attended with circumstances of deeper aggravation, because committed under a dispensation of clearer light and richer grace than that with which the sons of Aaron were favoured. Yet, strange to tell! we see no mark whatever of the divine displeasure towards them on this account. So far from it, that we may venture to say, that none of the servants of God, who walk in all his commandments and in all his ordinances blameless, have been more enriched with the gifts and graces of the Spirit, or have had their labours for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of saints, crowned with more abundant success than they.

A Pædobaptist, however, may be supposed to say, "You labour under a very great mistake, if you think of charging us with deviating from the prescribed rule of a positive institution. This deviation is not on our part, but on the part of the Baptists; for we are fully persuaded, and do verily believe, that Infant Baptism was practised by the Apostles themselves. We are confirmed in this sentiment by a learned friend of ours, who has recently taken a great deal of pains to prove, in a work that he has published on this subject, that the Greek word *oikos*, which in our translation is rendered *household* or *house*, signifies *family*, and consequently *must* include infants; on the supposition that infants were actually to be found in those families, (few in number) whose baptism is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. We are sorry that it is not in our power exactly to ascertain this fact. It must therefore rest on conjecture or probability. Had it

so happened that there had been infants in the ark, we should certainly have considered this circumstance as pleading strongly in our favour; especially under the idea that the ark is represented by the Apostle Peter as a figure of Baptism. Nay, had the matter been left vague and undetermined, we should have concluded, as in the instances before us, that infants *must* have been there, seeing the same term employed; for the Lord said unto Noah, "Come thou, and *all thy house* into the ark." The Apostle Paul also, in his epistle to the Hebrews, referring to the same transaction, tells us that "Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the *saving of his house.*" In this case we should have urged the extreme absurdity of supposing that no infants were to be found in that ark, whose inhabitants were destined to people the whole world with their future progeny. As it is, however, we are fully disposed to pass the matter over in silence, and should it at any time be referred to, strenuously to maintain that it has nothing to do with the subject. But to return from this digression. Taking it for granted, as we are compelled to do for want of proof, that there were infants in the families alluded to, our argument stands thus: Every general term *must necessarily include all* which that term is employed to express in its most extended signification. But this rule (if it may be so called) admits of so many exceptions, and the cases occur so frequently where these exceptions must be made, or we must violate all the dictates of common sense, that we scarcely know what to say. There is one instance puzzles us extremely, and the more so, as it stands closely connected with the ordinance in question. When our Lord gave his commission to his Apostles, as recorded by Mark, he commanded them to preach the gospel to *every creature.* The term creature, it

is well known, in its literal signification, includes irrational and even inanimate beings. In short, it extends to every person and every thing that is the subject of creating power. But to understand it in this sense, in reference to the above command, would be grossly absurd." "Not more absurd, however, (say the Baptists) than to understand the term *family*, where Baptism is concerned, as *necessarily* including infants; for brutes and blocks are as capable of understanding and receiving the gospel, as infants are of making that profession of faith and repentance, which is indispensably requisite to the due administration of the ordinance of Baptism. Let this, rather, be your rule of interpretation, a rule which will invariably apply to all cases that may occur: Every general term must necessarily admit of those exceptions which the nature of the subject and the dictates of common sense demand."

"Who shall decide when Doctors disagree?"

One thing, however, we cannot forbear remarking, that the continued existence of this contrariety of opinion among wise and good men, tends very much to confirm the idea, that Baptism was not intended to be a standing ordinance of the Christian church, or it never would have been left so extremely vague and indefinite.

We may further observe, that the dispensations of God, as the God of providence, and as the God of grace, form an infallible comment on his sacred word, especially the preceptive part; wherein we find the divine conduct repeatedly exhibited, as furnishing the most exact pattern for imitation, and the most powerful motive to obedience.

The Apostle Paul, in his exhortations to the exercise of mutual forgiveness, brotherly love, conjugal affection, and other relative duties, enforces all upon this ground: God hath forgiven you, and loved you; *therefore* ye ought *in like manner* to

forgive one another, and to love one another. John, the beloved disciple, pursues a similar course in his first general epistle, inferring, from the love of God to us, that we ought also to love one another. If he laid down his life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Our Lord himself also adopts precisely the same mode of reasoning when he says, " Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."

This was precisely the principle upon which the Apostle Peter proceeded on a very remarkable occasion. When charged with having acted improperly in holding *free communion* and intimate fellowship with Gentile converts, and admitting them to the full enjoyment of all the privileges of the Christian church, without requiring them to be circumcised, he rests his defence on this ground, and on this ground alone; for he uses no other argument in vindication of his conduct. " Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I that I could withstand God? And God, who knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put *no difference* between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Acts xi. 17, and xv. 8, 9. The scope of his reasoning is evidently to show, that where God has made no difference, we should make none. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, urges the duty of mutual forbearance exactly on the same ground; summing up the whole in this short sentence, " Wherefore, receive ye one another, as Christ hath also received us to the glory of God."

When the opponents of free communion are closely pressed with these and similar passages, they generally attempt to evade their force by alleging that they relate to the ceremonial law, which is now completely abrogated; that they must therefore be considered as irrelevant, having nothing to do with the positive institutions of the New Testament. But it ought to be remembered, that, however clear the subject may seem to us, the complete abrogation of the Jewish ritual was not fully understood by those whom Peter addressed, any further than they might draw the inference from the transaction which he narrated. They might reason thus, and no doubt many of them did so. Those services which were once enjoined with so much solemnity, and enforced with so much strictness, are now treated with indifference, and that even by God himself. Surely the purpose for which they were ordained must have been fully accomplished; and the reason of their enactment having ceased, the obligation to regard them has ceased with it: for we cannot believe, were they still in force, that He, who is so jealous of his honour, would suffer them to be totally neglected with impunity; much less that he would bestow his favours as liberally on those who pay no regard to them at all, as on those who observe them with the utmost strictness; making no kind of difference between the one and the other.

Let us apply this to the subject before us, and we shall see that Baptism stands exactly in the same situation in the present day, that circumcision did in the days of the Apostles. If the Baptists are right in their views of the ordinance, nothing can be more clear. According to them, Infant Baptism is no Baptism at all: it is a mere nullity. In their esteem, the far greater part of the Christian world, including some of the wisest and best men now on the face of the earth, are, to all intents and purposes,

unbaptized. It appears, then, that God bestows the gifts and graces of his Spirit alike upon the baptized and the unbaptized, just as he did in the primitive ages of the Christian Church, on the circumcised and the uncircumcised, without distinction. On the supposition that Baptism ought to be regarded as a standing ordinance, and insisted on as a term of communion, this is most unaccountable.

Now it so happens that Mr. Booth himself, in his defence of exclusive communion, adopts the very principle for which we contend, and rests the chief weight of his argument upon it: for he evidently considers the dealings of God with his professing people, when they fail in their observance of his statutes, as furnishing a criterion whereby we may infallibly determine the nature and quality of the offences with which they stand chargeable, and the judgment which we ought to form of them. Hence he infers, from the awful visitations of divine Providence on the two eldest sons of Aaron, and others who committed similar transgressions, the heinous guilt of deviating from the prescribed rule of a positive institution. But it is worthy of note, that every instance which he adduces is taken from the Old Testament, not one from the New. This is the more extraordinary, as in his controversy with Pædobaptists, he is perpetually exposing the absurdity of this mode of proceeding, when resorted to by them, in order to prove the right of infants to Baptism; considering it as betraying the weakness of the disputant, or the want of substantial evidence; as a tacit confession that Evangelists and Apostles afford but slender evidence in proof of the point which they wish to establish: otherwise, there would be no need to send us back to obsolete ceremonies, antiquated rites, the Old Testament, and the former dispensation, to know the meaning of the commission which our Lord gave to his Apostles,

and to learn the nature of an ordinance which is *peculiar* to the New Testament, and belongs solely to the present dispensation. But we would ask, Is it more absurd for a Pædobaptist to conclude from the promise which God made to Abraham, to be a God to him and to his seed after him, that therefore Christian parents ought to baptize their children, than for the advocate of exclusive communion to infer from the circumstance of the sin of Nadab and Abihu being punished by fire from heaven, that therefore Baptists are justifiable in refusing to admit Pædobaptists to communion with them at the Lord's table? We may here, *mutatis mutandis*, retort on Mr. B. his own language, and say, " May we not conclude that he would never have produced any passage from the Old Testament in favour of his sentiment, were he not keenly sensible that the apostolic writings do not furnish him with solid argument in its defence? But, as Dr. Watts observes, ' Through the influence which our own schemes or hypotheses have upon the mind, we sometimes become so sharp-sighted as to find these schemes in those places where the sacred writers never thought of them, nor the Holy Spirit ever intended them.' "

Mr. B.'s reasoning on this subject, however, is perfectly correct, so far as it goes to establish the general principle, that the conduct of God towards offenders forms a proper test, by which we may judge of the magnitude of the offence. But the due application of this rule must ever have respect to the nature of the dispensation under which the offence is committed, and the *actual treatment* which such offenders, or supposed offenders, receive from the hand of God. In this view of the subject, the justness of which is incontrovertible, Mr. B.'s argument may be turned completely against himself; for the principle which he has taken so much pains to establish, if properly applied, proves the truth of the sentiment directly opposed to that which it is ad-

duced to establish. The argument will then stand thus: If the awful judgments above referred to, evince the heavy guilt incurred by the slightest infraction of the ceremonial law, the seal of divine approbation which has been so evidently affixed to the labours of the faithful servants of Christ, notwithstanding their differing so widely from each other in modes of worship and discipline, and the administration of gospel ordinances, incontestably proves that such differences, however they may be magnified by the partizans of their respective sects, are of little or no account in the estimation of Him whose judgment is according to truth.

But how is it, some may be disposed to inquire, that such astonishing latitude should be allowed respecting the institutions of the gospel, whilst those of the law were enforced with so much rigour? There is no difficulty in assigning an adequate reason for this. Theologians, indeed, have involved the subject in perplexity, by employing the same term to designate the ordinances of the gospel, and the ceremonies of the law, calling them 'positive institutions;' and then, having thought proper to give the same name to both, they have immediately supposed them to be alike, and have argued from the one to the other, as if there were the most perfect resemblance between them; when, in fact, they differ from each other in nature and design, as much as the dispensations to which they respectively belong.

If we would entertain correct ideas of these dispensations, it must be, not by comparing them together, but by contrasting them with each other. The former dispensation was external, carnal, and worldly. Its ordinances are expressly called "carnal ordinances," the place where they were administered "a worldly sanctuary," and the law by which they were enforced, "the law of a carnal

commandment." Rites and ceremonies were essential to this dispensation. They were interwoven with its whole texture, and constituted its very being. They were "shadows of good things to come, patterns of things in the heavens." This rendered the exact observance of them so extremely important: for a small defect in a pattern may lead to an erroneous conception of the thing which it is designed to represent. But with us the case is far otherwise. We have the heavenly things themselves; not the type but the antetype; the substance, not the shadow; the reality, not the resemblance. The religion of Christ, consists not in meats and drinks, not in ceremonial observances, but in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The present dispensation is altogether spiritual; for in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love. It is not being baptized, or unbaptized, but being a new creature, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, that constitutes any one a child of God and a member of Christ: for, as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Hence, says the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Galatians, Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus: and IF YE BE CHRIST'S, THEN ARE YE ABRAHAM'S SEED; and heirs according to the promise. It is by a spiritual, not by a carnal birth, that we become entitled to spiritual privileges. Indeed, the difference between the two dispensations is such, that if, without bearing the distinction in our minds, we attempt to prove any controverted point by inferences drawn from the one to the other, we are almost sure to be led into error.

There are ordinances of divine service, it is true, under the present dispensation, as well as under the former one; but, congenial with the nature of that gospel which they are designed to unfold and exhibit, they may be considered rather as means of grace than acts of duty. They are the means of communicating the grace which God has promised, and the means of improving and strengthening the grace which he has imparted. In a devout attendance upon them, we are encouraged to expect that spiritual knowledge will be increased, spiritual dispositions exercised, and spiritual blessings enjoyed, to the glory of God. They are, therefore, set before us, rather under the idea of privileges of which we are invited to partake, than of duties which we are commanded to perform. Their manifest tendency to promote our instruction, edification, and comfort, the great purposes for which they were instituted, will be found to supply the best and most efficient motives for a constant regard to them; and at the same time, to furnish an unerring criterion, by which we may distinguish between such appointments as were ordained under peculiar circumstances, and for a special purpose, and those which should be regarded as standing ordinances of the Christian church.

The difference between the legal and the evangelical dispensation will appear yet more fully, if we consider the condition of the people of God under each, and the relative characters which they are consequently represented as sustaining. Under the former economy they were in a state of comparative darkness and bondage; under the present, of light and liberty. Their condition then, was that of a servant, who is told what he is to do, without being informed, or even permitted to inquire, why he is to do it. Their condition now, is that of a son, and of a son arrived at years of maturity, who is supposed

to understand his father's interest, and to be able to form a correct judgment of the way in which that interest may be best promoted. Our Lord, in allusion to this idea, says to his disciples, John xv. 15. "Henceforth, I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you." Such language certainly does not comport with the views which we have hitherto been led to entertain of 'positive institutions.' According to the definition usually given of that term, there can be no place for them under the present dispensation. They belong rather to the law, which was given by Moses, than to the gospel of grace and truth, which came by Jesus Christ. Rites and ceremonies make no essential part of his religion. He did not abrogate one ceremonial law to establish another ceremonial law in the room of it. We are now come, not to Mount Sinai, but to Mount Zion. We are not under the law but under grace. The gospel dispensation is a dispensation, not of the letter which killeth, but of the spirit which giveth life.

In relation to this subject, a modern writer thus expresses himself: "The Jewish and the Christian ceremonies, are represented by the Apostle Paul, as possessing the perfect correspondence of a shadow with the substance, of a type with the reality; but as exhibiting in all other respects, the strongest contrast. The institutions of the Jewish church were positive, and agreeably to their design, national, local, temporary. In those of Christianity, we perceive the character of universality and permanence. Scarcely any thing of a nature merely positive is to be found in the institutes of the New Testament. The will of Christ, so far as it respects his ultimate purpose in redeeming his church, is revealed with the utmost clearness, so as to prevent,

one might imagine, the possibility of mistake; but the directions are few, which enable us to determine or arrange the means of accomplishing his will, otherwise than by a careful reference to that design, which he has made it our duty to regard as our end. How much useless controversy would an attention to this simple truth have obviated!"*

Yes, we will venture to say, that a due attention to this simple truth, would tend more than any other consideration to bring to an amicable termination those unhappy controversies which still continue to separate Christians from each other, and prevent their cordial union in the fellowship of the gospel. "True it is (says the above cited Author in another place) that there is no book of Leviticus in the New Testament, for *there is nothing Levitical in Christianity.*"† We cannot, however, forbear remarking, that those who would enforce a Christian ordinance with all the rigour of the Jewish ritual, and attempt to justify their conduct in so doing, by referring us to the punishments inflicted for offences against the Levitical law, seem to act as if they belonged to the tribe of Levi. The principle on which they found their proceedings, is certainly more congenial with the former, than with the present dispensation. Were the simplicity and spirituality of the Christian system clearly understood, and the great end for which it was instituted properly regarded, no difference of opinion that might be entertained by Christians respecting external services could ever be considered as a proper ground of separation, or prevent their union and communion with each other.

The dissimilarity between the two dispensations

* See Conder on Protestant Nonconformity, Vol. I. pages 20, 21.

† Ibid. Vol. II. page 350.

will further appear, if we consider the nature of the respective covenants which constitute the foundation of each. The legal dispensation was founded on the covenant originally made with Abraham, but afterwards renewed and confirmed with the whole people of Israel at Mount Sinai, according to the declaration of Moses, "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb." This covenant included not only the ten commandments delivered with such awful pomp at Mount Sinai, but all those statutes and ordinances, which were subsequently made known to Moses, and by him communicated to the people. It was made with the nation of Israel *as such*, and contained promises and threatenings; but, exactly corresponding with the dispensation to which they belonged, the promises were promises of temporal blessings, the threatenings were threatenings of temporal judgments. The whole is summed up in a very concise manner by the prophet Isaiah, "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land, but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be cut off; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Thus their enjoyment of the promised blessings depended on their performance of the prescribed conditions.

But the evangelical dispensation is founded on another and a better covenant; yes, infinitely better. It is a covenant ordained for a better purpose, put into better hands, and established on better promises. It is better, also, in reference to its extent and its perpetuity. It is ordained for a better purpose. Not for the purpose of conducting the sons of Abraham, according to the flesh, to the possession of an earthly inheritance; but for a purpose infinitely more exalted, even that of bringing the sons of God—whom he is pleased to call out of a worse than Egyptian bondage into the glorious liberty of his own dear children—to future and ever-

lasting glory ; that, having their sins pardoned, and their persons accepted, through the atoning sacrifice, perfect obedience, and prevalent intercession, of their divine Redeemer ; being, by his Spirit and grace, made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light—they might, in due time, be brought to the full possession of that heavenly inheritance.

Again, The new covenant is put into better hands. The Sinai covenant was put into the hands of Moses, at the request of the people, and with the approbation of God ; for Moses was faithful in all his house. But the covenant of grace is put into the hands of Jesus Christ, who is not merely a servant *in* the house, but a son *over* the house; which house is his own ; being the purchase of his precious blood, and the residence of his indwelling Spirit. Moses was constituted the Mediator of the Sinai covenant, but he was nothing more than Mediator. In that capacity, he made known the will of God to the people, offered up prayers and supplications on their behalf, and set before them, in the most impressive manner, the consequences that would inevitably follow from their obedience or disobedience to the statutes and ordinances, which he had delivered to them at the command of God. This was the utmost that he could do. But Christ is not only the Mediator but the Surety of the covenant of grace ; which stamps an unspeakable value upon it, and gives the firmest stability to the hopes of those who are interested in its blessings : seeing that He, who is their Mediator and Surety, has undertaken, on their behalf, to provide all things requisite for their safe conduct through this wilderness world ; affording them the strongest assurance that he will never leave nor forsake them, till he has brought them to his everlasting kingdom and glory.

We proceed to observe, that the new covenant is

established on better promises, not only in respect of the superior nature of the blessings promised, which are spiritual and eternal, not merely temporal; but also in the security afforded for the complete and final enjoyment of these blessings. This is a very important consideration; and the Apostle does not fail to give it due prominence, when treating on this subject, in the eighth chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews; where he says, in reference to our Lord Jesus Christ, "He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises: for (adds he) if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For, finding fault with them, he saith, (alluding to the prophecy of Jeremiah, whence he makes the following quotation) Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: NOT ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT THAT I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS, in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." In the next chapter of the same prophecy, it is said, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Thus, we see that the forfeiture of these blessings by apostacy; or the falling short of them, through a deficiency in those dispositions, which were necessary for their enjoyment, was precluded by promises as absolute as those which relate to the blessings themselves.

This is, indeed, a covenant ordered in all things and sure.

Once more, The new covenant is better than the old in its extent and in its perpetuity. The covenant which God made with his ancient people was local and temporary. The blessings which it promised extended not beyond the borders of Judea, which is, therefore, called "The land of promise." Nor was it designed to continue. It was only meant to prepare the way for a better, an everlasting covenant, to which it should give place; a covenant, the blessings of which should be communicated to all nations and kindred, and people and tongues; and be perpetuated beyond the period of this mortal existence, even to eternal ages. That this covenant is not to be considered as a mere continuation of the former, with a few modifications, which circumstances might render necessary, but as one altogether new, whose introduction was to effect the entire removal of that which preceded it, is abundantly evident from the language of the Apostle, who adduces the very term by which it is designated, in confirmation of this idea. "In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vanish away."

But it may be objected, If this is a correct view of the subject—if, under the former dispensation, nothing was required but external obedience, and nothing promised but temporal blessings, what, on the one hand, can we make of the *spirituality* of the law; and how, on the other, are we to understand those exceeding great and precious promises, which are to be found in the Old Testament as well as in the New? To the first part of this objection we reply —that the law of Ten Commandments, commonly called the Moral Law, which is summed up in that comprehensive precept, "Thou shalt love the Lord

thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself," though delivered to the Israelites, as the depositaries of revealed truth, was not intended for them only, nor to be confined to that dispensation; but should rather be considered as the general rule of God's moral government, exhibiting a specimen of his requirements, as Creator and Governor of the universe, from all his intelligent creatures, and consequently, from the Israelites in common with the rest of mankind. But, even here, whatever was *peculiar* to them as a nation, was *external* and *temporal.* The preface to the Ten Commandments refers to a *temporal* deliverance; and the promise annexed to the fifth commandment, is a promise of *outward* prosperity, in connexion with an *earthly* inheritance. The above remark will apply to all those precepts which relate to internal dispositions, such as, "My son, give me thy heart." "Rend your hearts and not your garments," &c. &c.

With respect to those promises of spiritual and eternal blessings, which we find in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, we would observe, that the dispensation under which they were revealed, whilst it was typical of a better state of things, furnished the means, whereby the people of God, during its continuance, obtained the knowledge and enjoyment of those things; which, nevertheless, made no part of the dispensation itself, but rather belonged to gospel times and gospel blessings, which were therein predicted and prefigured. In this view, the Jewish economy may be fitly compared to a scaffolding, upon which we often see the materials of the future edifice: but those materials belong to the building, which is to continue, and not to the scaffolding, which must be removed as soon as the purpose for which it was erected is accomplished; that it may not encumber or disfigure the building when finished, to which, while in a state of progress, it was attached.

The difference between the former and the present dispensation is also evinced by the language of John the Baptist, in his address to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his Baptism. "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And *now* also the axe is laid unto the *root* of the trees: therefore *every* tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." These expressions clearly intimate that a dispensation was coming forward, which should proceed on a principle totally different from that of the former one. Here, not the outward conduct merely, but the *internal* state of the heart, from which that conduct emanated, would become the subject of severe scrutiny: for the axe was *now* to be laid to the *root* of the trees. We perceive, also, that this was to be an *individual* not a national concern: for we are told that *every* tree, which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire. It is likewise evident, that descent from godly parents would not be taken into the account. "THINK NOT TO SAY WITHIN YOURSELVES, WE HAVE ABRAHAM TO OUR FATHER." It is not pious ancestry but personal religion, not relative connexions but spiritual dispositions, which can be of any avail under the dispensation of the gospel. The above statement will appear peculiarly entitled to our regard, when we recollect that it is the statement of John the *Baptist;* and that it was delivered by him, while in the very act of administering that ordinance, which was appointed for the express purpose of introducing the present dispensation into the world.

Such were the declarations of the forerunner of our Lord, at this remarkable period. Had these declarations been clearly understood, and invaria-

bly acted upon, in the successive periods of the Christian church, we are fully of opinion that the dispute respecting the *proper subjects* of Baptism would never have existed. And had the Baptists, who have engaged in this controversy, bent their whole force to this point, instead of maintaining a sort of bush fighting, with Greek verbs and Greek prepositions, for the purpose of establishing a particular *mode* of administering Baptism, and then making the ordinance *so* administered, a term of communion, it is presumed that the contest might long since have been brought to a successful termination, which, upon their present plan of proceeding, it is never likely to be.

But to return:—Had Baptism been intended to have been perpetuated from age to age, as a standing ordinance of the church of Christ, retaining all the importance with which it was originally invested, and which the Baptists still attach to it; we might reasonably have expected that, when God was pleased to pour out his Spirit upon his servants to whom, as instruments, we are indebted for the glorious reformation from popery, he would certainly have enlightened their minds on this as well as on other important subjects; to the end, that an ordinance, the due administration of which is deemed essential to the enjoyment of Christian fellowship, might be restored to its pristine purity; that thus, being freed from the corruptions introduced by the grand apostacy, it might have been transmitted in its native simplicity through all the successive ages of the church down to the end of time. If this, however, was too much for the *first* reformers to attempt, considering the difficulties which they had to encounter, it might, at least, have been expected from their successors, who were not so circumstanced; especially from such of them as have deliberately renounced all regard to human authority

in respect of worship and discipline, as well as of doctrine; professing to consider the Scriptures as the *only* rule of faith and practice: yet, except paring off some of the grosser superstitions of the church of Rome, they have generally left Baptism nearly as they found it; not only admitting, but even vindicating, that application of the ordinance, which is regarded by many as a corrupt perversion of it.

This, however, is not the case in respect of the Lord's supper. There the reformation seems to have had its due effect. In Protestant churches that ordinance is generally administered according to its original design; and, where civil or political authority is not allowed to interfere, it appears in its original simplicity. But this is not the only circumstance in which it differs from Baptism. The Apostle Paul, who was eminently the Apostle of the Gentiles, gives particular directions respecting it, in his first epistle to the Corinthians; where, in detailing the account of its institution, he introduces the following declaration: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death *till he come*:" a mode of expression never employed respecting Baptism. We may likewise remark the peculiar solemnity of his address on this occasion. He speaks as having had a special commission from Christ for the purpose: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." But how different his language when Baptism is the subject! In the first chapter of the same epistle, after thanking God that he had baptized so few of them, he adds, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel."

It is also worthy of notice that, in the tenth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, when particularly pointing out those things which constitute a state of salvation, he makes no mention whatever of Bap-

tism, but only says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Here we see confession with the mouth occupying exactly the same place which Baptism occupied at the time of its original institution, according to the declaration, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The language of the Apostle forms a complete comment on that of our Lord, and points out the sense in which alone his solemn declaration on the subject can be properly understood; the letter of it being confined to the age in which it was delivered, whilst the spirit of it, as of every other precept, extends through each successive period of the church, down to the end of time. It is as much the duty of believers now to avow their attachment to Christ by an explicit declaration of their faith in him (the end for which Baptism was instituted) as it ever was. It is no less essential to the Christian character, and is equally necessary to constitute a state of salvation, as at any former period; though the precise mode in which that profession should be made, may vary according to times and circumstances. There have been periods when it would be impossible for a Christian to prove his faith to be genuine, or his profession sincere, without sealing that profession with his blood. This, indeed, is to drink of the cup of which the Saviour drank, and to be baptized with the baptism wherewith he was baptized. All are not called thus to manifest their faith in and love to him; but all are required to cherish a disposition which, if circumstances rendered it necessary, would constrain them to make such a sacrifice.

Hitherto we have considered Baptism, chiefly in

respect of the *subject* of the ordinance, without adverting to the *mode* of its administration. One reason for this, is, that as we do not regard gospel ordinances in the light of positive institutions, such as were prescribed by the ceremonial law, we cannot attach importance to the mere mode of performing any external rite under the present dispensation. As, however, the Baptists lay such a stress on the mode as to make it essential to the ordinance itself, considering none as baptized at all, but those who are baptized in *their* way; and as most of them make the ordinance *thus* performed, indispensably requisite to communion with them at the Lord's table, it may be worth while to show that, however plausible their arguments on this subject may appear, they do not amount to proof. Now, as this relates to what they term a positive institution, and as they have annexed so much importance to it, we have certainly a right to demand real, positive proof in its support; such as they never fail to require when Infant Baptism is the subject of controversy.

According to them, "Baptism is immersion; and Christian Baptism is neither more nor less than an immersion of the whole body in water, solemnly performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."* Their chief argument in favour of this sentiment is founded on the meaning attached to the original term by which Baptism is designated.

The principle on which they proceed, and which they consider as an established rule of criticism, is this; "that every word should be taken in its *primary*, *obvious*, and *ordinary* meaning, unless there be something in the connexion, or in the nature of

* See Dr. Ryland's "Candid Statement of the Reasons which induce the Baptists to differ in Opinion and Practice from so many of their Christian Brethren."—Page 7.

things, which requires it to be taken otherwise."* In order to ascertain this point, on which in their view so much depends, Lexicons and Lexicographers have been diligently consulted; the works of almost every author that has written in the Greek language, whether pious or profane, Jew, Heathen, or Christian, have been ransacked; and every signification that could possibly attach to the word, pointed out. The result has been, that the above authors appear to have *generally* employed the term, to signify the act of dipping, immersing, or plunging; whence it has been concluded, that such is its primary, obvious, and ordinary meaning.

But we apprehend that all this trouble might have been saved. In regard to any expression that relates to a religious ordinance, we conceive that the shortest and the surest way to obtain a right understanding of it, is to inquire in what sense such an expression was likely to be understood by those among whom the ordinance originated; and when a scriptural expression is the subject of discussion, we must search the Scriptures, if we would ascertain its meaning. In the present case, we should also do well to remember that the ordinance referred to, is evidently of Jewish extraction. It was introduced before the abrogation of the ceremonial law, and was, in the first instance, confined to the Jewish nation. We may, therefore, expect to see the term by which it is designated, employed in allusion to some of the services that were familiar to that people Nor shall we be disappointed. In the gospel according to Mark, we find it used by our Lord, when reproving the Pharisees for their neglect of the law of God, whilst they paid a super-

* See Dr. Ryland's "Candid Statement, &c."—Notes. Page xvi.

stitious regard to the traditions of the elders, particularly in the washing, or baptism, of cups, pots, brazen vessels, and tables. It is not necessary to suppose, nor is it likely, that the articles here specified were all washed exactly in the same way. Some might be cleansed by having water poured upon them, others by being dipt in water. In either case, they were washed or baptized. The same object was attained, and the same term is employed to designate that object. The act of purification seems to be the thing intended, by whatever mode that act might be performed.

We are confirmed in this view of the subject by the language of the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews, when, speaking of the ancient ceremonies of the Jews, he says, "Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, (or baptisms) and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation" The expression "divers washings," or baptisms, seems to refer to the various modes of purification in use among the Jews, such as dipping, pouring, and sprinkling. The last of these is particularly referred to in this connexion, as denoting the application of the blood of Christ to the conscience, to cleanse it from the guilt of sin. (See Heb. ix. 10—23.) Hence, it is called in the same epistle (chap. xii. 24.) "the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Peter, also, in his first epistle (chap. i. 2.) speaks of the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." The same term is employed to signify the renewal of the heart to holiness, as in that precious promise of the new covenant. (Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.) "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." Purification, or washing, is evidently the

idea meant to be conveyed in all these places, and the term washing is frequently used to express that idea. Thus, we find it employed Rev. i. 5. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." And in the epistle to Titus, (chap. iii. 5.) we read of "the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." In perfect accordance with this idea, we hear Ananias thus addressing Paul just after his conversion, in immediate reference to the ordinance of Baptism, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

It appears, then, that the *primary, obvious*, and *ordinary* meaning of the word Baptism, in respect of religious institutions, is that of purification, or washing; which, as we have seen above, might be performed, in the most literal sense, by pouring, and, in its moral and spiritual signification, by sprinkling, as well as by immersion. It is not, therefore, from the term itself that we can certainly conclude in what particular mode Baptism was administered as a Christian ordinance.

But, as the Baptists refer us to scripture examples for a confirmation of their views, it may be proper to attend to them; and see if we can obtain additional light on the subject of our inquiries, by examining the circumstances connected with the Baptisms recorded in the New Testament. There are but two instances, in which we have any particular account of the transaction; that of our Lord by John, his forerunner, and that of the Ethiopian Eunuch by Philip the Evangelist. In both these cases, it should seem that the subject went down with the administrator into the water, where he received the baptismal rite; after which, they both came up out of the water. But how that rite was administered while they were in the water, whether by dipping, pouring, or sprinkling, we are not informed. The

most probable conjecture is, that it was by pouring water on the head. There is certainly more dignity and solemnity attached to this mode of administering the ordinance than to that which is practised by the Baptists. The act of plunging persons backwards beneath the surface of the water; while it is revolting to the natural feelings, is but ill adapted to excite the feelings of devotion, either in the subject or in the spectators; nor is it at all congenial with the nature of a solemn act of worship, performed in the name of the sacred Trinity.

If we are right in our ideas of the way in which Baptism was administered, it exhibited at one view all the various modes in which purification was performed among the Jews; whether by dipping, pouring, or sprinkling; for here we have partial immersion, combined with the act of pouring water on the head; and if water is poured on one part, it must, of necessity, be sprinkled on other parts. No term could be found better adapted to designate this ordinance than that of Baptism; which, to the mind of a Jew, would convey the idea of purification in all its various modes. Our translators, therefore, acted very properly in retaining this term, instead of putting any English word in the room of it; as there is no word in our language which would suggest precisely the same idea.

Once more:—The term Baptism is often used figuratively. Let us inquire, then, in what sense it is to be understood when so employed; for this may materially assist us in our investigation of the subject. There is nothing more frequently, more strongly, or more directly alluded to by this term, than the communication of the Holy Spirit in his gifts and graces. Now, the influences of the Spirit are uniformly represented as coming down from above, falling, descending, being poured out, or poured down, on those who were the subjects of

them; like the holy oil (by which the same thing was intended) which was poured on the head of those who, under the former dispensation, were anointed to the office of prophet, priest, or king. If the rite of Baptism was thus administered, the allusion is just and striking; if otherwise, we are at a loss to conceive of its propriety. Let us hear the language of John the Baptist on this subject. "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." This declaration, with a little diversity of expression, is repeated by every one of the Evangelists. Our Lord himself employs similar language at the near approach of the period when the predicted event should take place. Just before his ascension, he says to his disciples, "John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." Accordingly, we find, on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out upon them from on high; as an emblem of which, cloven tongues, as of fire, sat upon each of them. In reference to this memorable event, Peter, when narrating the circumstances that attended the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles, thus expresses himself; "As I began to speak the Holy Ghost *fell* on them *as on us* at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed *baptized* with water; but ye shall be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost."

This ordinance is also emblematical of the sufferings to which our Lord was exposed, while accomplishing the redemption of his people; for thus he himself speaks, (Luke xii. 50.) "I have a Baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" To those who had witnessed the administration of this rite, in the midst of the

river Jordan, such an expression must convey a very impressive idea of the circumstances in which the Redeemer was placed; when, for our sakes, while encompassed with sorrows on every side, the wrath of God was *poured out* upon him, and the vengeance of heaven *fell* on his devoted head.

The Apostle Paul gives us the same view of the subject (1 Cor. x. 1, 2,) when, referring to the case of the ancient Israelites, he says, "Our fathers were *under* the cloud, and all passed *through* the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." With the waters of the cloud above them and of the sea on either side of them, they must appear in a situation very similar to that of those who were baptized by John in Jordan.

But the most striking representation of all, is that of Peter, in a passage already quoted; where, having spoken of the ark, in which Noah and his family were preserved during the flood, he adds, The *like* figure *whereunto*, even Baptism doth also now save us. Here the ark is not only represented as a figure of Baptism, but it is expressly said to be *like unto it*. It is impossible to conceive of any fact or circumstance that could be set before us which could look more like Baptism, or give us a clearer view of the mode, in which (as we apprehend) that ordinance was originally administered, than what is here exhibited; where we see the ark *partially immersed* in the waters of the flood, while water from above, is *pouring down* upon it.

There is one expression, however, of which it is necessary to take some notice; as the Baptists lay very great stress upon it, and consider it as conclusive in their favour. It occurs twice in the epistles of Paul, (Rom. vi. 4, and Col. ii. 12,) where the Apostle, speaking of believers in Christ, represents them as buried with him by or in Baptism. In the first of these places, the scope of his reasoning evi-

dently is, to show the obligations which devolved on those, who, by Baptism had made a profession of the name of Christ, to act consistently with that profession. "Know ye not (says he, in the preceding verse) that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death." The death of Jesus Christ, connected with his resurrection, while it formed the basis of their hope, constituted both the motive and the pattern of their obedience. By Baptism they professed themselves the subjects of that change of heart, which is sometimes represented as a new, spiritual and heavenly birth; at other times, as a resurrection from the dead. In that passage in the prophecy of Ezekiel, to which we have already adverted, after it is said, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you;" it is immediately added, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, (says our Lord to Nicodemus) he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Peter, in his first general epistle, (chap. i. 3,) speaks of believers as "begotten again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." But Paul, in the passage under consideration, represents this important change as having taken place, not only in consequence of, but in conformity to, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Therefore (says he) we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life: for if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

Mr. Scott, in his exccellent commentary on this passage, writes thus: "It is here shown, that a

Christian's profession implied this death to sin, that he may live to God. The Apostle inquires of the Romans, whether they did not understand that all who had been baptized into the name and religion of Jesus, had received the sign, and made the profession, of communion with, and conformity to, him in his death; that in virtue of his dying for their sins, they should die to, and cease from, the love and practice of all sin, and have done with their former unholy satisfactions, pursuits, habits, and connexions. This profession is equivalent to being 'buried with Christ,' as dead with him; for, as his burial was a manifestation that he was really dead, and an introduction to his immediate resurrection, by the glorious power of the Father, or for the display of his glory; so the baptism of a converted Jew or Gentile, was a professed manifestation of his death to sin, and to all his carnal expectations, affections, and pursuits, from which he meant to be entirely secluded, as one buried is from the affairs of life; and it was a professed introduction to his entrance upon a 'walk with God in newness of life,' not only as to his outward actions, but with respect to his inward principles."

It appears, then, to be the *import* of a profession of Christianity, rather than the precise *mode* wherein that profession is made, on which the Apostle founds his exhortation to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness; between which and the *actual* death and burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, he points out a very striking resemblance.

The above observations will equally apply to the corresponding passage, Col. ii. 12, where it appears to be the object of the Apostle, to wean the Colossians from a superstitious attachment to external institutions; seeing that all which might be deemed valuable and important in them, was to be found

in Christ; nor was Baptism itself of any account, but as a token of their faith in, and conformity to him; in whom alone they were complete.

We further proceed to inquire, if Baptism is to be viewed as a standing ordinance, who are the persons authorised to administer it, and under what description of character? The message sent to John by the rulers of the Jews, shows clearly that they considered a special commission from heaven as absolutely necessary for that purpose. Such a commission John had received, as he himself declares (John i. 33.) He was "sent to baptize with water." Such a commission was also given to the Apostles by our Lord himself, who, when he authorized them to baptize, furnished them at the same time with the power of working miracles in confirmation of the authority with which he had invested them. It may be said that Philip baptized who was not an Apostle. It is true: but Philip also wrought miracles, and who shall dispute the authority of him who can produce such credentials? Besides, Philip appears to have been one of those on whom the Apostles had laid their hands, by which significant act, accompanied with prayer, extraordinary powers were usually imparted. But to those who, in the present day, baptize without a special commission, and powers to verify such commission, we may say, with propriety, By what authority do ye this thing, and who gave you that authority? The Apostles, as such, have left no successors, and if they have not delegated the authority which they possessed to any other person or persons; nor, in any part of their writings, designated the characters to which this service properly appertains, and by whom it should subsequently be performed, the obvious inference is, that it expired with them and their contemporaries, no provision being made for its future continuance.

This work has generally been considered as peculiarly belonging to the pastoral office, and forming one of its essential duties. If this were really the case, we might expect to meet with particular instructions concerning it, in those epistles especially which are addressed to Ministers, of which there are two to Timothy, and one to Titus. These Ministers of the gospel were the companions of Paul in his travels, and were employed under his directions, in watering the seed which he had sown, and organizing the churches which he had planted; aiding them in the choice of proper officers, ordaining their elders, and superintending their affairs. To qualify them more fully for these various and important duties, as well as to assist and encourage them in their own ministerial labours, and in the exercise of personal religion, appears to be the great aim of the Apostle in these epistles. Accordingly, we find particular directions respecting the office of a Bishop or Pastor, and that of a Deacon, pointing out the qualifications requisite for the due discharge of their respective duties. There are also sundry rules in regard to discipline, and the infliction of church censures, according to the nature of the offence and the quality of the offender; together with some remarkable predictions relative to the grand apostacy, and various practical exhortations and admonitions. But, throughout the whole of these epistles, from the beginning to the end, we are not favoured with any directions respecting Baptism. We are left wholly in the dark, as to any department, or office in the church, to which it should be attached. Nor is the subject itself so much as once mentioned, or any hint given that might furnish a clue to our inquiries concerning it.

With respect to the preaching of the gospel, it is quite otherwise. Here we are told, that a Bishop should be "apt to teach." 1 Tim. iii. 2, and in

the second chapter of the second epistle to Timothy, the Apostle says, "The things that thou hast heard of me, among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Thus, a provision is directed to be made for the perpetuity of a gospel ministry, but none for the perpetuity of Baptism. The same silence on this subject is observed in other parts of Scripture, and in those parts where we might have expected to find it treated of at large. Paul, in his address to the Elders of Ephesus, (Acts xx. 18—35,) exhorts them to "take heed to themselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood;" but he says not one word about Baptism. Peter, also, observes a similar silence in his first general epistle, where he particularly exhorts the Elders to feed the flock of God, which was among them, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, &c. (See 1 Peter v. 1—4.). So that, whether the address is to Elders, Pastors, or Bishops immediately, or to Evangelists, whose business it was to ordain such, as well as to assist churches in the selection of suitable characters to fill these departments; still nothing is said, nor any hint given respecting Baptism as one of their official duties. There are various passages in the epistolary writings, (such as Rom. xii. 6—8. 1 Cor. xii. 8—10. Ephes. iv. 11,) in some of which the gifts of the Spirit are enumerated; while in others the offices are specified, wherein these gifts were to be exercised: but Baptism finds no place in either the one or the other.

Now, as the command to proselyte and baptize was given to the Apostles by our Lord himself; as we never find any presuming to baptize but Apostles or Evangelists, who were their associates in this important work, being endued with miraculous gifts for that purpose, or such as acted under their

own personal authority; as the work of baptizing has never been consigned to any description of Ministers, inferior to Apostles or Evangelists; we cannot but conclude that Pastors of churches, or Ministers in general, in the present day, have no scriptural warrant for performing that work, any more than Deacons or even laymen; seeing that the office of Pastor or Minister of the gospel, differs so materially from that of Apostle or Evangelist, that no command given to the one, can be considered as conveying authority to the other.

But, it may be observed that there is a description of Ministers employed, as instruments, in the conversion of the Heathen, who, though not designated Apostles or Evangelists, are engaged in a service very similar to theirs; and, as the first preachers of the gospel were commanded to baptize those whom they proselyted, it seems but reasonable to infer, that such as are called to one of these offices may consider themselves as authorized to perform the other. There is much weight, we acknowledge, in this observation, and, were the call to proselyte the Heathen, whatever may be understood by that call, accompanied with the gift of miracles, as it certainly was in the first instance, the argument might be deemed unanswerable. But the state of the world at large is far different from what it was at that period. Idolatry is not now, as formerly, seated on the throne of universal dominion, with all the power and wealth, science and literature, of the most polished nations, combined with the deep-rooted prejudices of every class of society, enlisted on its side, and engaged in its defence. Miraculous powers were found necessary to break such a formidable phalanx, and an initiatory ordinance was appointed to distinguish those who renounced its dominion from such as continued in subjection to its authority. Now, however, the scene is changed;

for though idolatry still lamentably prevails over a large portion of the habitable globe, it is over that portion only which is sunk in barbarism, or, at best, very partially civilized: and the diffusion of general knowledge, together with Christian principles, has so direct a tendency to expose the absurdity of the system, as effectually to prevent its regaining its former ascendancy over the minds of men.

We may further remark, that it has been so ordered of late, in the course of divine Providence, as if to show that Baptism is not so necessary or important as some might imagine, even in the heathen world; that whole nations, in the South Sea Islands, have renounced idolatry and embraced Christianity, without having this ordinance introduced among them.* To whatever cause this omission may be traced, it is abundantly evident that the influence of the Spirit, accompanying the word preached, has not been withheld on account of such omission. Be this, however, as it may, we still maintain that, could it be incontrovertibly proved to be the duty of Missionaries to baptize those who were proselyted by their ministry, it would by no means follow, that this ordinance should be entailed on their descendants, or continued in countries where Christianity is universally professed. If it is still to be administered, let it be by Missionaries, and by Missionaries only. In short, from every view which we have hitherto taken of the subject, we derive additional conviction of the propriety of considering Baptism as an ordinance of proselytism, of which, if continued at all, Missionaries are the only proper administrators, and Proselytes the only proper subjects.

* See a "Narrative of the Mission at Otaheite, and other Islands in the South Seas," lately published by order of the Directors of the London Missionary Society.

But how is it, some may be disposed to ask, if the promise of miraculous gifts was co-extensive with the command to administer Baptism, that the latter should have continued to exist so long after the former has ceased. To this we reply, that, had it been as much within the compass of human ability to perform miracles as to dispense ceremonies, there is every reason to believe that the former would have continued quite as long as the latter. Those who are acquainted with human nature must have observed, that men in general are much better pleased with that, in religion, which is outward and visible, than with that which is inward and spiritual; and prefer that which makes an appeal to the senses, before that which requires the exercise of faith. Hence the attachment of the Jewish Christians to the law of Moses; and when, by the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem, they were driven from that ground, they immediately set to work to make the present dispensation as much like the former one as possible. Christian ordinances were supposed to bear an exact resemblance to such of the Jewish ceremonies as appeared to have the same spiritual signification. Thus Baptism is said to have come in the room of Circumcision, and the Lord's supper in the place of the Passover; being, like them, "positive institutions;" as much so, we have been told, as any that belonged exclusively to the Jewish ritual. With this strong propensity in our nature, it need not excite surprise that Baptism, in some form or other, should continue as a ceremony, long after the end and design for which it was instituted had ceased to exist. This also will account for the extreme importance attached to it soon after the days of the Apostles, its consequent perversion, and the superstitious and absurd ceremonies with which it was so quickly encumbered. Like the body when the

vital spark is extinct, it was soon turned into a mass of corruption; and now, bereft of its pristine beauty and vigour, incapable of exercising its former functions, and scarcely retaining a single lineament of those features which were originally impressed upon it and rendered it a just object of regard, it is become not only useless but injurious, not merely an idle ceremony, but a root of error, and a bone of contention.

The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, in order more fully to show the impropriety of continuing the observance of ceremonies, after the end for which they were instituted had been fully accomplished, compares the Jewish ritual, with the covenant on which it was founded, to a garment in a state of decay through age. We may apply the idea, with additional force, to Baptism, as practised in the present day. It is, indeed, a garment not only worn with age, but sadly torn, soiled, and disfigured; insomuch that it appears, with the ceremonies patched upon it, the errors cleaving to it, and the dissensions occasioned by it, to be rendered totally unfit for use, and the disgrace of that family of which it was once the ornament.

If our views of the nature and design of the original institution are correct, it will follow that Baptism is not now practised, by any denomination of Christians, in the way, and for the purpose, for which it was specially appointed, so that it is virtually abolished. We have the name, but the thing intended by it is not to be found. With respect to the mode, it is a singular circumstance, that although all the pictures, prints, and engravings, whether ancient or modern, which we have seen, of the baptism of our Lord by John, or of the Eunuch by Philip, exhibit precisely the idea which we have suggested (except only one or two prints of very recent date, and evidently manufactured for a par-

ticular purpose); yet we know not any denomination of professing Christians, who administer the rite in this manner. All either dip or sprinkle. The introduction of Infant Baptism rendered a deviation from the original plan, in some sort, necessary; for though infants may be either sprinkled or dipt, yet, they cannot walk down, with the administrator, into the water, and there, while both are standing in it, have it poured upon their heads.

With respect to the practice of baptizing infants; as it certainly does not answer the purpose for which Baptism was originally appointed, that of a personal, individual profession of Christianity; as it does not appear to have been commanded by our Lord, and we have no satisfactory proof that it ever was practised by the Apostles; as there is nothing in it congenial with the nature of the present economy, or with the constitution of those churches which are formed on the plan of the New Testament; we are under the necessity of concluding that it owes its origin to an overweening attachment, manifested at a very early period, to an abrogated dispensation, of which infant circumcision was one of the carnal ordinances. Its obvious tendency, and general effect, is to blend the church and the world, and to substitute nominal for real religion. It has by many, to their soul's eternal ruin, been put in the place of that righteousness, which alone can make the sinner just, and of that change of heart, without which, according to the express declaration of our Saviour, no man can enter into the kingdom of God.

But, it may be said that we cannot, from the abuse of any thing, deduce a just argument against the true and proper use of it. What then, we should be glad to know, is the true and proper use of Infant Baptism? What are the special advantages resulting from the practice? For our parts, we have

not yet been able to discover any one good end, supposed to be answered by it, but what may be and is attained full as well without it as with it. We are confirmed in this sentiment by observing that, in those families where it is not practised, the children are as piously educated, and as frequently become, in early life, the subjects of converting and sanctifying grace, as where they are said, while in a state of infancy, to be dedicated to God by Baptism. All the ordinances of Christ are designed and adapted to promote the instruction, comfort and edification, of those who rightly partake of them. But what edification, what comfort, what instruction can Baptism administer, when an infant is the subject? It is often called an *initiatory* ordinance. But, under such circumstances, we would ask, *Into what* does it initiate? Into the doctrines, the duties, or the privileges of Christianity? Doctrines which an infant cannot understand, duties which an infant cannot perform, privileges which an infant cannot enjoy!

Notwithstanding the absurdities inseparably connected with the practice, (and it would be easy to fill a volume on the subject,) it appears that there are those, some of whom might have been expected to have known better, who cling, with astonishing tenacity, to this *uncommanded* rite. An eminent Pædobaptist Minister was lately heard to say, that he would sooner relinquish his pastoral charge than give up the Baptism of infants. Another, no less respectable, piously exclaims, "Thank God, we can conscientiously inculcate Infant Baptism!" If, in opposition to this sentiment, we presume to suggest the idea, that the ordinance of Baptism, when administered to infants, is not adapted to answer any valuable purpose, we are immediately told, that "nothing can be more absurd than to deny the utility of what we have never tried, in contradic-

tion to those who have tried it. Even if we have tried it, without finding it useful, this cannot prove that others have not found it so."* Persons who reason in this way, would do well to recollect, that the grossest superstitions that ever were practised under the name of religion, have been defended upon this very principle. Tell a Roman Catholic, for instance, that the sacrifice of the mass, auricular confession, penances, and pilgrimages to holy wells and holy mountains, answer no valuable purpose whatever, he will probably reply, "We have tried these things; we have found the benefit of them; and nothing can be more absurd than to deny the utility of what you have never tried, in contradiction to those who have tried it. Even if you had tried it, without finding it useful, this would not prove that others had not found it so." With respect to the comfort and edification which some profess to have experienced in dedicating their children to God by Baptism, we may adopt the language of Mr. Greatheed, in his letter to the Editor of the Evangelical Magazine, on External Christian Institutions; where, in reference to the Baptism of adults who have been educated as Christians, he says, "I do not question, that pious people may have received spiritual benefit in the devotional engagements connected with it, as in any other solemn religious service: but this they might surely as well have done in Christian 'doctrine and fellowship, and breaking of bread and prayer,' without perverting Baptism from its original purpose."

Though some, on mistaken principles, may thus tenaciously adhere to Infant Baptism, it will be

* The above remark is quoted *verbatim* from a letter of the late Mr. Greatheed, in reply to one addressed to him by the author of this work.

found on examination that the greater part of those who retain the practice hold it with a very loose hand. Even such of them as consider Baptism, of some sort or other, absolutely necessary, as a preliminary to communion at the Lord's table, entertain no scruples as to the kind of Baptism which may have been employed. Any thing that is called by that name will answer their purpose; no matter when, how, or by whom administered; whether in infancy or in riper years; by sprinkling or by immersion; by the hands of a Baptist or Independent Minister; by the Parson of the Parish, or by a Romish Priest, with ceremonies as absurd and unscriptural as any of the rites of Paganism. Baptism seems to be regarded by such, as a certain indescribable something, of which they can give no rational account: which they, nevertheless, conceive, ought to be attended to, somehow or other, by all who would be thought Christians; but then, as it is universally admitted that Baptism once performed should never be repeated, having been baptized, as they suppose, in infancy, they think they need give themselves no further trouble about it. The feeling which they cherish on this occasion, is very similar to that of a person who has had the small-pox; whether in the natural way, by inoculation or by vaccination, in infancy or at mature age, he considers himself as secure from the complaint, at any future period of his life, and that he may, therefore, safely dismiss the subject from his thoughts.

Adult Baptism, it must be acknowledged, is quite another sort of thing. It certainly bears a much greater resemblance to the Baptism of primitive Christians than what we have just been considering. But then, in respect of the important end for which the ordinance was appointed at that period, it may, as practised among us, be fitly compared to a body recently deprived of life, which, though it should

retain the features, is incapable of exercising the functions, with which it was originally endowed. It is still, indeed, an ordinance of proselytism; but, here, instead of being used in proselyting to Christianity, it proselytes to a particular sect of Christians. Hence, as we have often witnessed, when a truly pious character, who, for a series of years, has made an honourable profession of religion, and even been eminently useful as a preacher of the gospel, adopts these views of the ordinance and acts accordingly, the general impression is, not that he is become a Christian, but that he is turned Baptist. His personal Christianity was previously too well established to need such evidence to support it.

Baptism, in such cases, appears to answer no end whatever, except it be, to tell all whom it may concern, that he who was formerly a Churchman, an Independent, a Methodist, or a Quaker, is now a Baptist. Thus that ordinance, which was originally the distinguishing badge of Christianity, is become the mere badge of a sect, adapted to excite a sectarian spirit, and promote sectarian views. Now we cannot persuade ourselves that Baptism was ordained for any such purpose as this; least of all, that it was designed to furnish one particular sect with the arrogant claim of an exclusive right to sit down at the table of the Lord; while they refuse to acknowledge, as churches of Christ, any Christian societies that are not formed precisely on the same model with their own. That this is the principle on which the Baptists proceed, their conduct sufficiently evinces. They hold no communion with any churches but those of the *same faith and order* with themselves. They give no dismissions to them, and receive no dismissions from them. Nor is the operation of this act of exclusion from Christian fellowship confined to Pædobaptists. It extends to churches of their own denomination who allow

of free communion. In their esteem, the admission, into such a connexion, of a single individual, who has not been baptized as they have been baptized, is sufficient to contaminate the whole body, and render the society, of which he forms a part, unworthy to be designated a church of Christ, or treated as such.

A circumstance which fell under the observation of the writer of these remarks, who was acquainted with the parties concerned, may serve to illustrate and confirm what is advanced above. A young man, of respectable connexions, having become a member of a strict Baptist church in the metropolis, went, shortly after, to reside in a neighbouring village, where he sat down as an occasional member, with a church of the same denomination, which admitted of mixed communion. Conceiving it probable that he should fix his abode there, he sent for his dismission; but it could not be granted. The church with which he had occasionally communed, though of the same faith was not of the same order with that which he originally joined. Some time after this, there appeared to be an opening for one in his line of business, in a town at a greater distance from the metropolis. He accordingly went. Here he found a strict Baptist church. Now he thought that he must be right. No obstacle could remain in the way of obtaining his dismission, nor any pretence, as he conceived, be urged for withholding it. How greatly then was he mortified on being informed, that he was *not* a member of the church, and therefore *could not* be dismissed. The fact was, that his first application disclosed the circumstance of his having sat down at the Lord's table with unbaptized persons; a crime, it should seem, in the estimation of this church, of sufficient magnitude to procure his expulsion from their society. Now, as both these churches were as re-

spectable, and the ministers who presided over them as eminent for piety and talents, as any in the denomination, the inference is, that this may be considered as a fair specimen of their mode of proceeding in similar cases. Churches acting upon a different plan, and pursuing a different line of conduct, would, of course, be regarded as irregular and disorderly.

And is this the Baptism which was commanded by our Lord, and practised by his Apostles? Surely not. That was, indeed, a noble institution, while, as the token of a personal profession of faith, it united all who bore the name of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, as one fold, under one Shepherd. But Modern Baptism, whether, as on the one hand, administered to unconscious babes, or, as on the other, made the engine of a party, and the standard of sectarianism; while it unites such as should be kept separate, and separates such as should be united, instead of claiming our regard, as a standing ordinance of the Christian church, rather merits our reprobation as a standing disgrace to the Christian name.

That Baptism was originally of Divine appointment is readily acknowledged, and so was the serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness. That serpent, in the hands of him to whom the command was given, to exhibit it to the view of the whole camp of Israel, answered a very important purpose. But, after that purpose had been fully accomplished, when, coming at a subsequent period into other hands, it was perverted to superstitious uses, and became the object of idolatrous veneration, Hezekiah very properly ordered it to be destroyed. And could our feeble voice prove as effectual in one case, as the mandate of authority did in the other, we would say of Modern Baptism, Let this superstitious ceremony, this root of error,

this bone of contention, be completely removed out of sight; and let no trace of it remain, except on the records of the sacred page; where, like the brazen serpent, it may prove the vehicle of instruction, without becoming an engine of mischief.

The disputes which it has been the means of exciting and perpetuating, not only between Baptists and Pædobaptists, but among Baptists themselves, tend, in no small degree, to stamp importance on the sentiment for which we plead, as the most effectual means of reconciling these jarring disputants, and uniting them in the bonds of Christian fellowship; it being acknowledged on all hands, that, could it be made to appear that the ordinance of Baptism is not of perpetual obligation, no ground of contention would remain between them.

The controversy recently agitated on "Terms of Communion," may be considered as a contest between *Christian* principles and *Baptist* principles. Like two hostile armies set in battle array, they are directly opposed to each other. Both cannot maintain their ground: one or other must yield. Either the letter of the law of Baptism must be sacrificed, or the spirit of the gospel of Christ must be violated. It is the unhappy lot of those who advocate the cause of exclusive communion to differ not only with their brethren but with themselves, and their own avowed principles. By refusing to hold communion at the Lord's table, with persons of undoubted, yea, of eminent piety, whose characters they revere, and the success of whose labours in the cause of Christ, fills their souls with unfeigned joy, they act as inconsistent a part as can well be conceived. They plead apostolic precedent. But when were the Apostles, or primitive Christians, known to deny access to the table of the Lord, to such as they acknowledged to be Christians, walking con-

sistently with their profession, and of whose genuine piety not the least shadow of doubt could be entertained? It may be said that *such a case* could not occur in the primitive church, as no unbaptized Christians were then to be found. Be it so. It seems, then, that the precedent on which they lay so much stress, is no precedent at all. It does not apply to the subject: for, it appears, by their own showing, that *such a case* could not exist at the period referred to. It is, therefore, not a case in point, and consequently can yield no support to the argument which they attempt to found upon it.

The practice of the Apostles was doubtless in perfect unison with the principle by which they have directed us to regulate our conduct. "Receive ye one another, as Christ hath received us to the glory of God." Some have objected to the application of this rule to the subject before us, because Baptism is not mentioned in it, nor is there any ground to conclude that it was in the contemplation of the writer at the time. It appears, however, to have been his intention, on this occasion, to lay down a maxim which should apply to those minor differences of sentiment and practice which might at any time be found among real Christians. Respecting Baptism there could be no such difference at that period, for very obvious reasons. But He, by whose authority the principle was established, directed the Apostle to record it in his epistles; well knowing that, though the dispute which occasioned its suggestion would soon be buried in the ruins of the temple and city of Jerusalem, never to rise again, other grounds of difference, not then existing, would make their appearance, to which the above maxim would properly apply; and, by a due attention to which, Christians might be preserved from violating the spirit of the gospel while

zealously contending, as they might conceive, for the letter of its institutions.

It is an additional objection to exclusive communion that, while it unduly magnifies the ordinance of Baptism, it also perverts that of the Lord's supper, and defeats one great end of its institution; rendering that very ordinance the bar of separation, which the Redeemer appointed as the bond of union among his disciples and followers. To make this apparent, let us consider, for a moment, the important event which it was designed to bring to our remembrance, connected with the circumstances attending its first celebration. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, (says the apostle) ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." But for what purpose did this great event take place, and what was the end to be accomplished by it? It was, as we have already observed, "to gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad." This, we acknowledge, was not the only end, but it certainly was a very important one, or it would not have been made so prominent as we see it, in the passage above alluded to. Let us then attentively peruse the history of this transaction, as recorded by the Evangelist John, together with the discourse which our Lord delivered to his disciples on this solemn occasion. What are its principal features, and what is the scope of the whole? It is replete with heavenly wisdom and divine consolation. But the duty which it particularly enjoins, is that of brotherly love. No where in all the Bible is this duty so repeatedly urged, and so powerfully enforced; for on no other occasion was a scene presented to view so well calculated to give effect to the exhortation. Let us hear the words of our divine Redeemer, at this very interesting period. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as

I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Again, "This is my commandment that ye love one another as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Once more, "These things I command you, that ye love one another." (See John xiii. 34, 35. xv. 12—14, 17.) To this may also be added the remarkable petition in the intercessory prayer of our Lord, which, at the close of this discourse, he offered up on behalf of his disciples, saying, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word: *that they all may be one;* as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, *that they also may be one* in us."

In this view of the subject, how admirably is the ordinance of the Lord's supper adapted to promote Christian unity, by reminding us, that when the Saviour shed his precious blood, when he laid down his life for the sheep, it was for the purpose of *uniting* them (however diversified their circumstances) to himself and to one another, as one fold, under one Shepherd; and that his last prayer, and dying exhortations, all tend to the accomplishment of this great and important object.

What then shall we say to those who in *this* ordinance refuse to hold communion with their brethren of a different denomination, with whom they can nevertheless unite, with the utmost cordiality, in every other act of social worship and spiritual intercourse; who will not recognise such as Christians, at the table of the Lord, though, in any other situation, they will cheerfully acknowledge their claim to the character?

The language of our Lord, when, on a certain occasion, foretelling his sufferings and death, is very

significant: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Now where and when is the influence of this heavenly magnet so likely to be sensibly felt, as at the table of the Lord, round which his people meet to partake of the memorials of his dying love; when Jesus Christ is evidently set forth before their eyes, as crucified among them? And yet, strange to tell! there are those who seem as if they had discovered the unhappy art of investing this centre of attraction with the power of repulsion, and rendering the very focus of union the point of separation.

In acting thus, they do violence not only to Christian *principles* but to Christian *feelings*. Every affection of the renewed mind revolts at such a line of conduct. Do they appeal from the feelings to the judgment, we have not the least objection to have the cause we plead tried before that tribunal, and are willing to stand or fall by its decision; being fully persuaded that the dictates of an enlightened understanding will concur with the affections of a gracious heart to pronounce a verdict in our favour. Is it then, we would ask, consistent with just reasoning to refuse to hold communion with our fellow-Christians in one ordinance, on the subject of which we are perfectly agreed, because there is another ordinance, which has no necessary or immediate connexion with it, respecting which different views are entertained. If so, then it would follow, that we ought not to maintain communion with our brethren in *any thing* that relates to the duties or privileges of Christianity, unless there was an exact conformity between us in sentiment and in practice, with respect to *every thing* belonging to the system; which would render all the apostolic exhortations to mutual forbearance in regard to difference of opinion completely nugatory

That there is no more connexion between Bap-

tism and the Lord's supper than between Baptism and any other branch of Christian worship (as even Mr. Kinghorn himself seems to admit) is abundantly evident. No two ordinances can be more distinct from each other. They were appointed at different times, and for different purposes; and where one is enjoined, the Scripture is silent respecting the other. We are told, indeed, in the history of the proceedings on the day of Pentecost, that they who gladly received the word, were baptized, and that they continued stedfastly in the Apostle's doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. This appears to be the only place where Baptism is associated with the Lord's supper (supposing that the expression, "breaking of bread," is to be understood in relation to that ordinance). But even here, it is no less intimately connected with the Apostle's doctrine, and fellowship, and prayers; so that, if the want of Baptism would exclude from the table of the Lord, it would equally exclude from those other exercises of devotion and instruction, which are represented as designating the Christian character. We conceive, therefore, that we are perfectly justified in the inference, that the practice of exclusive communion is both irrational and unscriptural, standing opposed to the most correct dictates of the judgment as well as the best affections of the heart.

Mr. Booth, in his Apology for the Baptists, seems very much hurt at the idea suggested by one of his opponents, that their conduct in refusing to admit Pædobaptists into communion with them, is "*greatly prejudicial* to the honour and interest of true religion, and *not a little contributing to the cause of infidelity.*" But if we consider how much the interest of true religion is promoted by the cordial union of real Christians, and that of infidelity by their contentions, divisions, and separation from

each other, the expression, however harsh it may sound, will scarcely seem too strong.

If, however, exclusive communion is completely at variance with *Christian* principles, the opposite practice is no less incompatible with *Baptist* principles. Here, the opponents of mixed communion have the advantage of their antagonists. For, what can be more inconsistent than to maintain that Baptism is a positive institution, and a standing ordinance of the Christian church, and yet treat it as a matter of indifference, and countenance the total neglect of it; by admitting to an *equal* participation of *all* the privileges of church fellowship, those who are unbaptized with those who have paid a regard to that ordinance?

In a church so constituted, Baptism not being the door of entrance, it will sometimes happen, with respect to persons who have not turned their attention to the subject, or duly considered it, at the time of their joining the church, that, after a lapse of years, they will feel their minds powerfully impressed with the idea, that hitherto they have neglected to yield obedience to a positive command of Christ. Under this conviction, they come forward and are baptized, as if they were but just setting out in the ways of God; though they have been not only professors of religion, but members of that very church, many years before. Now, we conceive that, if there is any necessity for Baptism at all, it is at the commencement and not at the close of a religious profession. Every thing is beautiful in its season; but this is out of season. It is like sowing when we ought to reap, and casting in the seed when we should thrust in the sickle. And what a spectacle does such a church exhibit, the members of which have some of them been baptized before they joined the church, some on their forming a connexion with it, others ten, fifteen, or, it may

be, twenty years after that event has taken place, and others who have never been baptized at all! Yet this is denominated a *Baptist* church!! What right it has to such an appellation, we leave others to determine.

Mr. Hall contends that the universal adoption of the plan of mixed communion would considerably promote the Baptist interest. But, with due deference to his superior judgment, we must confess that we are much inclined to think that the opposite effect would be produced; especially when we consider that what, in many instances, constitutes a powerful motive for paying a practical regard to Baptism, is, on this principle, taken completely out of the way. We are fully persuaded that there are hundreds, if not thousands, who have been baptized by immersion, where Baptism is made a term of communion, that never would have submitted to that ordinance, if they had not been influenced by a strong desire of being closely united with those churches of which they are now members. "What! (perhaps some may be ready to reply, with a tone of indignation) do you suppose, then, that such persons have acted contrary to the conviction of their own minds?" By no means: we have no idea of bringing such a charge against them. But, we do verily believe that, had they not been prompted by the motive above stated, they never would have paid that attention to the subject, which issued in their conviction. We are sufficiently acquainted with human nature to know that the disposition has a considerable influence over the judgment. When there are two ways to attain the same object, one difficult and troublesome, the other plain and easy, it is no hard task to determine which will be generally preferred. Who would wade through the pool before the house, in order to enter at the front door, when, by taking a few steps to the right or to the

left, he might be admitted at a side or a back door, be received with a hearty welcome, and have free access to every room, with all the privileges of an inmate?

The strict Baptists are fully aware of this, and have felt, as might have been expected, tremblingly alive to the interests of their denomination; well knowing that in proportion as Mr. Hall's system prevails, the cause which they have espoused must sink. Stripped of its importance, bereft of its utility, and no longer subservient to any valuable purpose, it would soon, like a worn out garment, be totally laid aside. No wonder, then, that they should take the alarm, summon all their forces, and dispute every inch of ground; when one, who is a host of himself, brings the whole weight of his mighty artillery to bear, not merely on their outworks, but on the very citadel of their strength; threatening, at least in their esteem, should his efforts be crowned with success, to deprive them of that which is peculiarly dear to them. For what can be supposed to hold a much larger place in the affections of Baptists than Baptism? The zeal which they have ever manifested in its defence sufficiently evinces the reality and strength of their attachment. It is, indeed, their distinguishing characteristic, the very name after which they are called; a name which is marked (so to speak) on every bale of their ecclesiastical commodities. Their denomination is the Baptist denomination; their ministers are Baptist ministers; their churches are Baptist churches; their societies for propagating the gospel at home and abroad, are Baptist societies; and their magazine is the Baptist Magazine. In short, you may as well expect a Christian to renounce Christianity, as a Baptist to give up Baptism.

Mr. Hall, indeed, as if to allay their fears, does

in effect assure them, that exclusive communion is the exclusive object of his attack. Let this be surrendered, let mixed communion be allowed to occupy its place, and there is no ground for alarm. The Baptist interest, which they hold so dear, instead of being impaired or diminished would be wonderfully strengthened and enlarged by the change. Pædobaptists, being brought under the ministry of Baptists, would have their minds enlightened on the subject; and the cause which they have so much at heart would mightily grow and prevail. But the strict Baptists are very far from perceiving the justness of this inference. They are at a loss to conceive how the mere circumstance of Pædobaptists attending on the ministry of a Baptist should effect such a change in their views, as to overcome their objections to Baptism by immersion, and induce a practical regard to that ordinance; when all that they are likely to see or hear in relation to the subject, would rather tend to confirm them in the ideas which they had previously entertained, that it was of little or no importance, and altogether unnecessary. For, it should be observed that, in those churches where Baptists and Pædobaptists are indiscriminately associated, in a sort of co-partnership, it is generally understood, if not absolutely stipulated, as a term of communion, that Baptism should be kept out of sight as much as possible; that it should scarcely ever be mentioned, and never insisted on, lest the peace of the church should be disturbed, and the harmony of its members be interrupted.

This is a subject for serious consideration. It certainly constitutes a very strong objection against mixed communion; since a minister is thereby exposed to the temptation of shunning to declare the *whole* counsel of God, or what he esteems to be such, in order to avoid giving offence to some of

the members of his church. Thus the love of truth is sacrificed to the desire of peace. Nor is this all. We are the creatures of habit; and it is impossible to say what injurious habits this mode of proceeding may lead to the indulgence of, both in ministers and people. It may induce in ministers a habit of temporizing, which, beginning in things of comparatively small importance, may be gradually extended to subjects of far greater moment. The people, also, being accustomed to see an *acknowledged duty* treated as a matter of indifference, may be led to excuse themselves, while living in the omission or neglect of more important duties; not having kept alive in their minds a due regard for the authority of Christ, and the necessity of rendering implicit obedience to *all* his commands.

There is another objection to mixed communion, which should not be lightly passed over. In some Baptist churches, Pædobaptists have been admitted in such numbers, that on the demise of their Pastor, they have formed the majority of the members, and chosen a Pædobaptist minister to succeed him. Thus, in the estimation of those who are outvoted, the ordinance is lost out of the church. Such circumstances have frequently occurred; in relation to which, Messrs. Bogue and Bennett, in their History of Dissenters, make the following remarks: "Some Baptists, upon the liberal consideration that those who differ from them conceive themselves baptized, admit them to the Lord's supper, which is called open, or more properly, mixed communion. As those Independents, who practise Infant Baptism, generally admit Baptists to their communion; in some churches, there has been such an intermixture, both of pastors and of members, that *it would be difficult to know under which denomination they should be placed.*" Such churches seem very much to resemble those amphibious animals who, by liv

ing sometimes in the water and at other times out of the water, render it very questionable to which class they really belong.

But the mischief is not confined to the *actual* change which may thus be made in the constitution of the church. Supposing such an event should never take place, still the possibility, if not probability, that it may occur at some future period, has a tendency to excite a spirit of jealousy and dissatisfaction between the opposite parties, which, in proportion as it prevails, must prove destructive of that peace and unity which ought to subsist among members of the same church. Thus, one of the strongest arguments in favour of mixed communion, that of promoting brotherly love, is turned against the practice; this object being completely defeated, and a contrary effect produced.

From this brief review of some of the leading points of the controversy relative to terms of communion, it clearly appears that, whether we adopt the system of Mr. Hall, or that of Mr. Kinghorn, we are surrounded with difficulties. All these difficulties, however, we cannot forbear observing, arise from the admission, on both sides of the question, that the ordinance of Baptism is of perpetual obligation, and as binding on the followers of Christ now as when it was first appointed. Let but this be relinquished, and every difficulty vanishes. If, on the other hand, we are determined to hold it fast, we are inevitably brought to this conclusion—that our Lord has appointed a standing ordinance in his church, which he has left in such a state, and his people under such circumstances, as to render it impossible for them to enforce it, as it was originally enforced, or to pay that regard to it, which ought to be paid to *every* injunction of Him who is King in Zion, without acting inconsistently with Christian principles, or doing violence to Christian

feelings; principles which God has laid down in his Word for the government of his people, and feelings, which, by his Spirit, he has implanted in their hearts.

Many have been ready to conclude, that Baptism must be a standing ordinance, because those who have differed the most concerning it, in every other point of view, have agreed in acknowledging its perpetuity. But this by no means follows. Such as are acquainted with ecclesiastical history may recollect, that there was a period when a dispute arose between the Eastern and Western churches, respecting the proper time of keeping Easter; in consequence of which, a separation took place, which has continued to the present day. But it does not appear, during the utmost heat of the discussion, to have entered into the minds of the disputants, on either side, to call in question the necessity of keeping it at all, and thus settle the point at once. Since that time, however, the obligation to regard it has not only been questioned, but absolutely denied, by a numerous and respectable portion of the Christian world, even the whole body of Protestant Dissenters. Now, what has happened in respect of the keeping of Easter, may happen in regard to the administration of Baptism. And should this revolution take place in the mind of the religious public, we should hail it as one of the most auspicious signs of the times; indicating the near approach of that period, when Judah shall no more vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim envy Judah.

If, however, this is too much to be expected at the present moment, it is, at least, high time that *something* should be done, to put an end to the present state of things; which, so long as it is suffered to continue, cannot fail to prove a source of incalculable mischief, injury, and disgrace, to the common cause of Christianity. While Baptists and

Pædobaptists persist in holding one another at arm's length, and regarding each other with an eye of jealousy; he who cannot go the full length of either of the parties, is almost sure to be repulsed by both. If, after close investigation, he can find no authority in the New Testament for the practice of Infant Baptism—should it appear to him totally uncongenial with the spirit and constitution of the present dispensation, and, in fact, a mere nullity (and, by the way, it requires no superior talent to arrive at such a conclusion; it being one of those subjects of which we may say, in the language of the poet, "All heads can reach it, and all hearts conceive") —if, under these impressions, concluding, as most do, that Baptism is a standing ordinance, and an indispensable duty, he should unite in sentiment and practice with the Baptists; unless, indeed, he imbibes their spirit, and becomes *exclusively* one of their party, he will probably not have been long in communion with them, before he will find himself assailed with "You a Baptist! you're not half a Baptist! you're more of a Methodist than a Baptist!"

If, offended with their want of liberality and their groundless assumption of superiority over other sects, he leaves them, and goes among the Independents or Methodists, it is more than probable that he will be repelled on another ground. Unless he is prepared to renounce the sentiment as well as the communion of the Baptists, and acknowledge the validity of Infant Baptism, his new friends will soon make him feel that he is *not one of them.* The tocsin of alarm will be sounded. It will be heard throughout their whole camp. "A Baptist! a Baptist! a Baptist! You must beware of him, or he will certainly drag you into the water." Thus, he unhappily becomes the object of suspicion and dread, and is shunned, as if he were infected with

a contagious distemper. In vain does he remonstrate; in vain does he appeal to the general tenor of his conduct; in vain does he protest, and refer to those who have the best means of knowing the truth of the assertion, that he has never obtruded the subject of Baptism on such as were differently minded in regard to that ordinance. It signifies nothing. He is a *Baptist.* That is enough.

Another evil, inseparably connected with the present system, is its direct and immediate tendency to preclude free inquiry. There are, we have no doubt, among the professors of religion in the present day, thousands, and tens of thousands, who cling to Infant Baptism, as a tradition received from their fathers, of which they can give no rational account; knowing no scripture to warrant it, no reason to enforce it, and no advantage to recommend it; except, when the service is performed in a parish church, that of referring to the official register at any subsequent period, if necessary, to verify the transaction. But why so tenaciously adhere to a practice, in favour of which they have so little to advance? The reason is obvious. If Infant Baptism is a nullity, it follows, as a necessary consequence, that they are *unbaptized.* It being deeply rooted in their minds, that Baptism, of some sort, is indispensably requisite, in compliance with the command of our Saviour, they seem to be pretty well aware that, should they examine the subject, for the purpose of attaining full satisfaction respecting it, the result might be, that they *must* either violate conscience, by living in the omission of *known* duty; or, alienate themselves from their present connexions, relinquish, it may be in some instances, an extensive sphere of usefulness, and unite themselves with a sect, which they have ever been accustomed to regard with disgust and aversion. They, therefore, shut their eyes and stop

their ears against every thing that might possibly produce such an effect. 'They do not wish to read or hear any thing about *Baptism.* It is very well for them to attend to it that *see it* to be *their duty*, and, indeed, *they ought* to do it; but as for themselves, they were baptized in infancy, and that is enough: they do not want to be baptized over again; and, after all you can say, it is a mere non-essential.' The uneasiness of the mind, on such occasions, is generally visible in the countenance; and were the subject to be pressed any farther, it would be beyond endurance. They would be seized with a sort of *hydrophobia*, and the dread of being hurried into the water would take full possession of their disordered imaginations.

And must things continue for ever in this state? Surely not. Those party walls which have so long separated Christians from each other, built of incongruous materials, and with untempered mortar, are hastening to their downfall. The dew of heavenly grace, with an irresistible, though secret influence, is, even now, pervading and dissolving the substance of which they are composed. Our business, at the present moment, is to clear away the rubbish with which their mouldering ruins have overspread our path; while, in the confidence of faith, we anticipate the period, when the Spirit, being poured out from on high, shall carry them away, as with a mighty torrent, and not leave one stone upon another.

We are encouraged in this expectation, by considering the effects actually produced by the outpouring of the spirit on the day of Pentecost; when a church was formed, the privileges of which were to be enjoyed equally by Jews and Gentiles without distinction. The foundation of this union of characters, previously so opposite to each other, was laid in the death of Christ, by whose blood they

who had been far off were made nigh. "For he (says the Apostle) is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain, one new man, so making peace, and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

We learn from the above statement, not only the cause of this important event, but the means whereby it was accomplished. The enmity subsisting between Jews and Gentiles was taken away by abolishing the occasion of that enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances. And who can tell but it may please God to reconcile Baptists and Pædobaptists by abolishing the ordinance of Baptism; or, rather, by showing both the one and the other of the contending parties that that ordinance was not designed for perpetuity; and that its obligation ceased, so soon as it ceased to answer the end for which it was appointed? We do not expect such a change in public opinion to be suddenly effected. Customs long established and universally observed, are not quickly laid aside. The ceremonial law was held in high veneration by the believing Hebrews, for a considerable time after its abrogation by the death of Christ. The difference of opinion which then prevailed respecting their obligation to observe it, was, doubtless, suffered to take place, for the purpose of giving scope to the exercise of that mutual forbearance, which was so forcibly inculcated upon them, and which it is the duty of all Christians, under such circumstances, invariably to regard. And can a better reason be assigned for the permission of those differences that subsist among us, or a greater benefit be derived from their continuance!

But the practice of exclusive communion defeats this end, and deprives us of this benefit; the only benefit which can, in any degree, compensate for that which is in itself so great an evil. It affords consolation, however, to reflect that this Antichristian practice cannot continue long. It must fade and fail, and, at length, totally disappear, before the bright shining of that light, which has already dawned upon us, and which will shine yet more and more unto the perfect day. The nature and design of the present dispensation, the genius of the gospel, and the spirit of the times, are all against it. It has been weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Its days are numbered, and will shortly be finished. We have seen how directly it stands opposed to Christian principles and Christian feelings; and, as for apostolic precedent, when properly examined, it appears on the other side of the question. But we will go a step further.

We do not hesitate to assert that exclusive communion is contrary, not only to the example of the Apostles, but to the express injunction of our Lord himself. When he instituted the sacred supper it was for *all* his disciples to partake of it, and, in administering the cup, he particularly said, "Drink ye *all* of it." The Protestants, on this ground, censure the Roman Catholics, and very justly, for withholding the cup from the laity. What then must we think of the conduct of those who withhold both bread and wine from the whole Christian world, except their own narrow denomination? Like the church of Rome, advancing the arrogant claim of being the *only* true *apostolic* church, they *unchurch* all Christian societies but their own, and *unchristianize* every individual professor of religion, who does not belong to their party. We say unchristianize; for what do we mean by that term, except it be, to treat a person as if he were *no*

Christian? And this they do in regard to every person to whom they deny access to the table of the Lord. They do, in effect, say to such, "You may be outward court worshippers. You may attend those religious exercises, which are open to all, whether pious or profane, Jew, Heathen, or Infidel; but this is an ordinance designed for *Christians only;* within this sacred inclosure you must not enter." If this is not treating a person as if he were *no Christian,* or, which is the same thing, unchristianizing him, we know not what is.

They may say in reply, that they are very far from entertaining such an unfavourable opinion of those who differ from them on the subject of Baptism, though they refuse to hold communion with them at the Lord's table. They may allege, in proof of this, the circumstance of their frequently attending on the ministry of such, and even inviting them to occupy their pulpits. Strange inconsistency! To invite a person to occupy the pulpit whom they do not deem worthy to approach the table. They have no objection to sit *under* him as a preacher of the gospel, though they scruple to sit *beside* him as a fellow-communicant. Now we do think that if any distinction should be made between the pulpit and the table pew, it is the former rather than the latter that requires the exercise of caution. We can easily conceive of a truly good man, who, having embraced some strange notions, and being in the habit of using unguarded expressions, may often injure the cause which he means to promote by his pulpit discourses; but what harm even such a one can do by sitting down at the table of the Lord, we cannot conceive. To admit a person, therefore, into a situation where much mischief may be, and often has been done, and refuse him a seat where, in the nature of things, no mischief can be done, is preposterously absurd!

And can it be supposed that the ordinance of Baptism was instituted to countenance such conduct as this? Is it not far more rational to conclude that it was appointed solely for the introduction of a *new* dispensation into the world; and that it was for this express purpose that the commission to administer it, was given by our Lord to his Apostles. We are confirmed in this idea, by observing that though, in the execution of this work, they associated others with themselves, yet they never delegated the authority by which they performed it to any that should come after them in the successive periods of the church.

Again,—The command to baptize being immediately followed by the promise of miraculous gifts, there is no more reason to conclude that the former is of perpetual obligation than that the latter is of perpetual duration; seeing that there is no limit assigned to the one more than to the other. And, indeed, if we consider Baptism in respect of the nature and design of the institution, we need not hesitate to affirm that it did not long survive the age of miracles. A superstitious ceremony, called by that name, has, we admit, been practised from the above period down to the present time; but this bears no resemblance to the ordinance appointed by our Lord and administered by his Apostles, whether we view it in reference to the subject, the mode, or the end of its administration.

An attempt has been made, of late years, to recover Baptism, and bring it back to its original design. But what has been the result? Instead of restoring it to the churches of Christ, as the doctrines of the gospel were restored at the reformation from popery, the only effect has been, to detach a small portion of Christians from the rest of their brethren, and form them into a distinct sect, maintaining principles incompatible with the principles

of Christianity, and manifesting a spirit diametrically opposite to the spirit of the gospel; *excommunicating** every professor of religion, who does not entertain their views, and adopt their plans.

Against this system of exclusive communion we feel it necessary to enter the most decided protest; as its direct and immediate tendency is, to cherish that spirit of bigotry and intolerance, which we cannot but detest and abhor.

Be that bigotry far from our breast,
Which would Christian from Christian divide;
Which by blind party zeal is caress'd,
The offspring of folly and pride.

Names, parties, and sects disappear,
With their separate interests and laws:
No name but of Christ would we hear,
No interest but that of his cause.

We think it necessary, however, to say that, while thus strongly reprobating the practice of exclusive communion, we would not be supposed to give an unqualified approbation to the plan of mixed communion; which we think liable to serious objections, as stated above. We conceive that there is a broad line of distinction between the two, though that distinction has not been clearly pointed out by those who have engaged in the controversy on either side. One reason of this may be, the custom generally prevailing among Independents as well as Baptists, of making the circumstance of being actually admitted a member of some *regular* church, as it is called, an indispensably requisite qualification for sitting down at the table of the Lord. Now, we must own, we see no ground for this; and we are fully persuaded that the Scriptures give no countenance to such a mode of proceeding.

* See Hall's Reply to Kinghorn, Part III. Chap. ix.

The Lord's supper was instituted for the Lord's people. It is the birthright of those who are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ; a privilege from which none of their brethren have any right to exclude them, except (as must always be excepted) when they are chargeable with denying the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, or acting in a manner grossly inconsistent with their Christian profession. With this exception only, we have every reason to believe that primitive Christians never denied access to the Lord's table, to those whom they considered as belonging to the household of faith; nor is there any reason why we should.

It may, indeed, be expedient, so long as a diversity of opinion prevails respecting modes of worship and discipline, and minor points of doctrine, that members of the same church should, as much as possible, be of the same mind and of the same judgment. Let Baptists then unite with Baptists, Pædobaptists with Pædobaptists, Calvinists with Calvinists, and Arminians with Arminians; but let these communities, though perfectly distinct, recognise each other as churches of Christ, receiving dismissions from one to the other without scruple; and let individuals sustaining the Christian character, be freely invited to partake of the Lord's supper, whenever and wherever that ordinance may be administered, without regard to sect or denomination. It would then be, what it was originally designed to be, a bond of union and not a bar of separation among the followers of Christ.

We appeal to Christian common sense, if such a plan would not better accord with the spirit of the gospel than that which has been adopted of late, particularly by the various tribes of Sandemanians, whose divisions and subdivisions are endless. Hence, we are repeatedly hearing of some fresh commander

of a petty squadron, quitting the regiment to which he formerly belonged, and marching off, with his little company, to a remote part of the camp; where a separate table must be kept, and none, on any account, be permitted to sit down at that table, but such as belong to his company!

If difference of opinion, on various topics, must subsist among real Christians, never, O never, let those points of difference be so magnified as to prevent such as are children of the same family, redeemed with the same blood, partakers of the same Spirit, and heirs of the same inheritance—from sitting down at the same table, to commemorate that great and glorious transaction, on which all their hopes are founded, and whence all their comforts spring.

We are aware that sentiments which stand opposed to current opinion, must have many difficulties to encounter before they can be expected to prevail. Old prejudice is commonly too strong for young conviction, and is frequently known to stifle it in the birth. Persons are not easily dispossessed of ideas which they have cherished with fond attachment for twenty, thirty, or forty years together; which have 'grown with their growth, and strengthened with their strength;' which are interwoven with all their views and feelings, and entwined round every fibre of the heart; and, what is still worse, the more erroneous these ideas are (such is the perverseness of human nature!) the firmer will be their hold of the mind, and the greater the difficulty of eradicating them; for it is with error as it is with vice: nor shall we find it a much easier task to induce him to think right who has been in the habit of thinking wrong, than to prevail on him to do good who has been accustomed to do evil.

What presumption then (some may be ready to say) must possess the writer, to obtrude his senti-

ments on the public, *without a name* to recommend them; when, under the most favourable circumstances there are such difficulties to be surmounted! He is, however, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, encouraged to proceed, under a full persuasion that, if his views are correct, they will ultimately prevail. Truth is slow in its march, but it is progressive, and will finally triumph. And, what if God, who delights to abase that which is high, and exalt that which is low—who sometimes employs things which *are not* to bring to nought things that are—should please, in order to secure the whole glory to himself, to make use of an obscure, an *unknown* individual, as an instrument in his hands, for effecting that which learning and talent, combined with *known* respectability, have attempted in vain. There was a period, when a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and it so happened, doubtless under Divine direction, that the arrow shot from a bow, drawn by an *unknown* hand, was made the means of accomplishing a more valuable and important purpose, than appears to have been effected by any that issued from the quivers of the most renowned, the most mighty, or the most skilful, among all the hosts of Israel, or of Syria.

Whatever construction may be put on the foregoing remarks, it affords, at least, some consolation to reflect, that if no good should be produced by this work, no harm is likely to ensue from it. It creates no sect, forms no party, and excites no divisions. On the contrary, its obvious tendency is to put an end to those divisions and contentions, which still subsist among Christians, by removing the cause of them—showing—that true religion, the religion of Jesus, consists not in modes and forms and rites and ceremonies, but in the knowledge and enjoyment of God; faith in, and love to Christ; communion with him, and conformity to him;—that the circumstantials of religion are of

no account whatever, any further than they are adapted to promote these ends—and that this constitutes the test or *rule*, by which we are to judge of their importance and of their permanence. "For (says the great Apostle of the Gentiles) in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to *this rule*, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

To conclude:—Should these thoughts and observations, which the writer committed to paper as they occurred to his mind, and now presents to the public, prove the means of promoting peace and unity among the people of God—that in one spirit, with one mind, they may henceforth *strive together* to diffuse the savour of evangelical truth, and advance the kingdom and interest of the Redeemer—he shall consider himself amply remunerated for the time and pains bestowed upon them, and to God be all the glory. AMEN.

THE END.

ERRATUM.

Page 36, line 11, *for* antetype, *read* antitype.

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